DC COMICS™

BATMAN®

KNIGHTFALL

VOLUME THREE

KNIGHTSEND

BATMAN

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volume three

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DOUG **MOENCH** ALAN **GRANT**
CHUCK **DIXON** JO **DUFFY**
DENNY **O'NEIL**
writers

MIKE **MANLEY** BRET **BLEVINS**
GRAHAM **NOLAN** RON **WAGNER**
TOM **GRUMMETT** JIM **BALENT**
JOE **RUBINSTEIN** BARRY **KITSON**
MIKE **VOSBURG** MIKE **GUSTOVICH**
ROMEO **TANGHAL** LEE **WEEKS**
PHIL **JIMENEZ** MD **BRIGHT**
JOHN **CLEARY**
pencillers

DICK **GIORDANO** BRET **BLEVINS**
BOB **SMITH** SCOTT **HANNA**
RON **McCAIN** RAY **KRYSSING**
RICH **BURCHETT** MIKE **MANLEY**
JOE **RUBINSTEIN** MIKE **GUSTOVICH**
ROMEO **TANGHAL** JOHN **STOKES**
KLAUS **JANSON** PHIL **JIMENEZ**
inkers

ADRIENNE **ROY** DIGITAL **CHAMELEON**
BUZZ **SETZER** DAVID **HORNUNG**
colorists

KEN **BRUZENAK** TODD **KLEIN**
JOHN **COSTANZA** WILLIE **SCHUBERT**
ALBERT **DE GUZMAN** BOB **PINAHA**
letterers

KELLEY **JONES** WITH ALLEN **PASSALAQUA**
collection cover artists

Batman created by
BOB **KANE**

Denny O'Neil **Scott Peterson** **Archie Goodwin** **Jim Spivey** **Neal Pozner** Editors – Original Series
Jim Spivey Associate Editor – Original Series
Jordan Gorfinkel **Darren Vicenzo** **Chuck Kim** Assistant Editors – Original Series
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Robbie Biederman Publication Design

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BATMAN: KNIGHTFALL VOLUME 3
KNIGHTSEND

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THE STORY SO FAR...

Batman has lost his once mighty grip on Gotham thanks to a seemingly never-ending slew of menacing villains. Pushed to the physical and mental limit, he is finally defeated by Bane in an epic showdown and he retreats to heal. Worried for the state of Gotham, Batman appoints Jean-Paul Valley (aka Azrael) to temporarily take his place.

Lacking Bruce Wayne's sense of integrity and infused with a violent, vengeful spirit, Azrael swiftly gets out of hand, alienating both Robin and Commissioner Gordon in the process. He seals off the Batcave from Wayne Manor and grows increasingly disturbed and turbulent. Against Bruce's orders, he defeats Bane, wearing enhanced armor he designed. He allows the crazed mass murderer Abattoir and his hostages to fall to their deaths, and feels no remorse.

At first, Bruce is impressed with Azrael's results, but when a beleaguered Robin tells Wayne of Abattoir's death, he resolves to reclaim the Batman mantle.

Cover art by KELLEY JONES and JOHN BEATTY

KNIGHTSEND PART ONE

BATMAN®

DC®

BATMAN

509 JUL 94

$2.50 US
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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

HONORABLE KELLEY JONES AND MOST HIGH JOHN BEATTY

MOENCH
MANLEY
GIORDANO

KnightsEnd Part 1

SPIRIT of the BAT

YOUR SCENT, SWEET *JASMINE*-- YOUR EYES, COLD *STONE*. YOU ARE *LADY SHIVA*... WHOSE LIFE IS LIVED ONLY FOR *VIOLENCE*.

MY LIFE IS LIVED FOR *SKILL*.

YOU SLEEP *LITTLE*, AND YOU WAKE UP CRAVING *BLOOD*.

I CRAVE *CHALLENGE*.

YOU ARE A *VAMPIRE*, PERVERTING A GIFT WHICH COULD MAKE YOU *IMMORTAL*.

DOUG MOENCH
Story
MIKE MANLEY
Pencils
DICK GIORDANO
Ink
ADRIENNE ROY
Colors
KEN BRUZENAK
Letters
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL
Assistant Editor
DENNIS O'NEIL
Editor
BATMAN created by Bob Kane

I CARE NOTHING FOR WHAT HAPPENS OR HOW I AM REMEMBERED AFTER DEATH.

TO PROVE MYSELF THE BEST IN LIFE--THAT IS MY PASSION.

CALL YOUR ATTENDANT.

AND YOU HAVE CHOSEN ME AS THE NEXT PROOF.

I WANT A WITNESS

THE TEST ITSELF IS NOT ENOUGH?

THERE ARE SEVEN MASTERS WHO WERE ONCE PUPILS.

SHOULD MY ATTENDANT WITNESS MY DEFEAT, SHE WILL GO TO THE SEVEN.

ONE BY ONE, THEY WILL COME AFTER YOU--FOR VENGEANCE.

CALL YOUR ATTENDANT.

THEN YOU CRAVE EIGHT PROOFS...AND YET, WHAT PURPOSE CAN BE SERVED BY THE SEVEN FOLLOWING ME-- WHEN ALL SEVEN LEARNED AT MY FEET?

CALL HER.

SONG LI!

KLAP

YES, MASTER.

BEAR WITNESS...

...TO OUR UNARMED COMBAT.

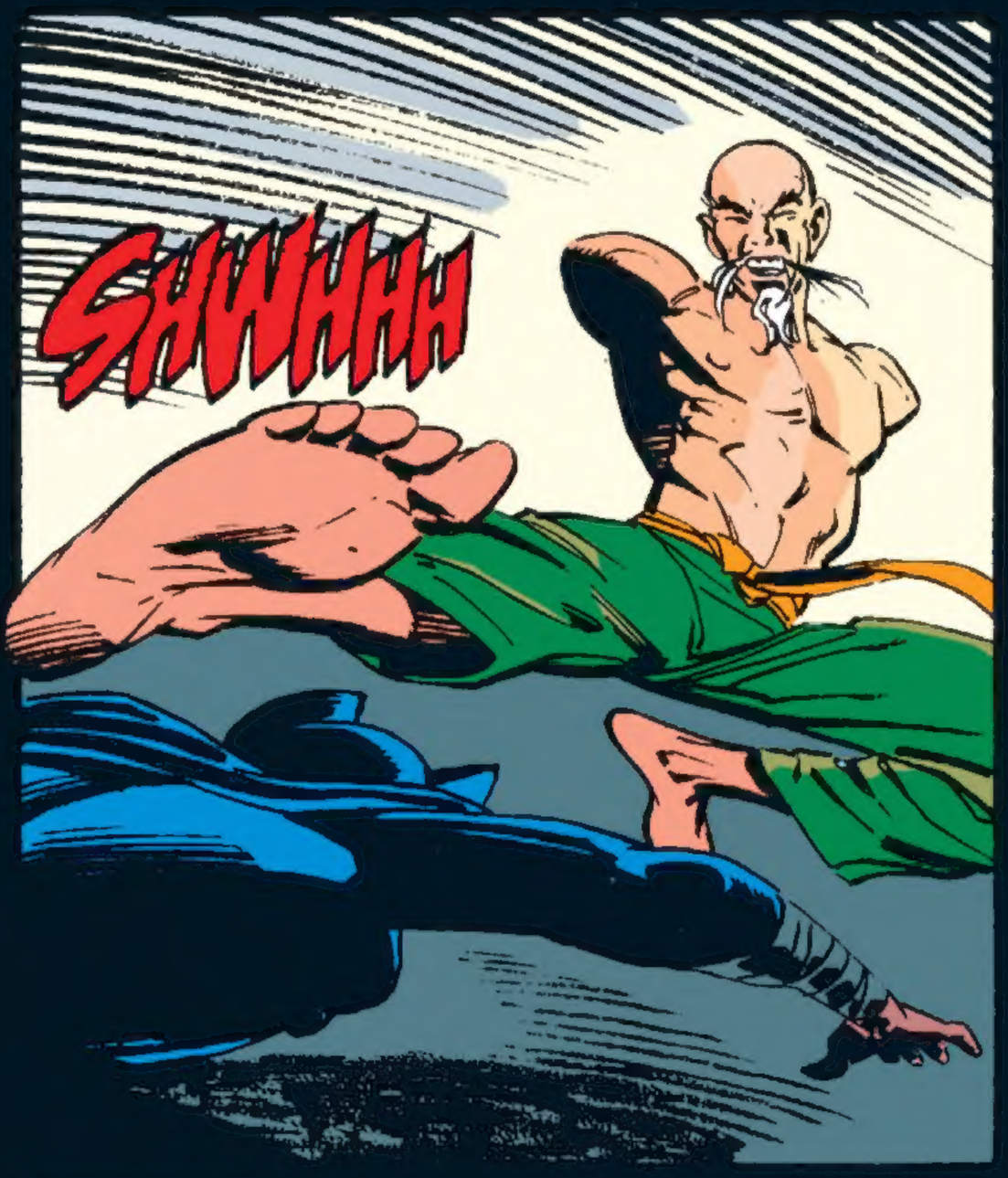
EH? THAT MASK.

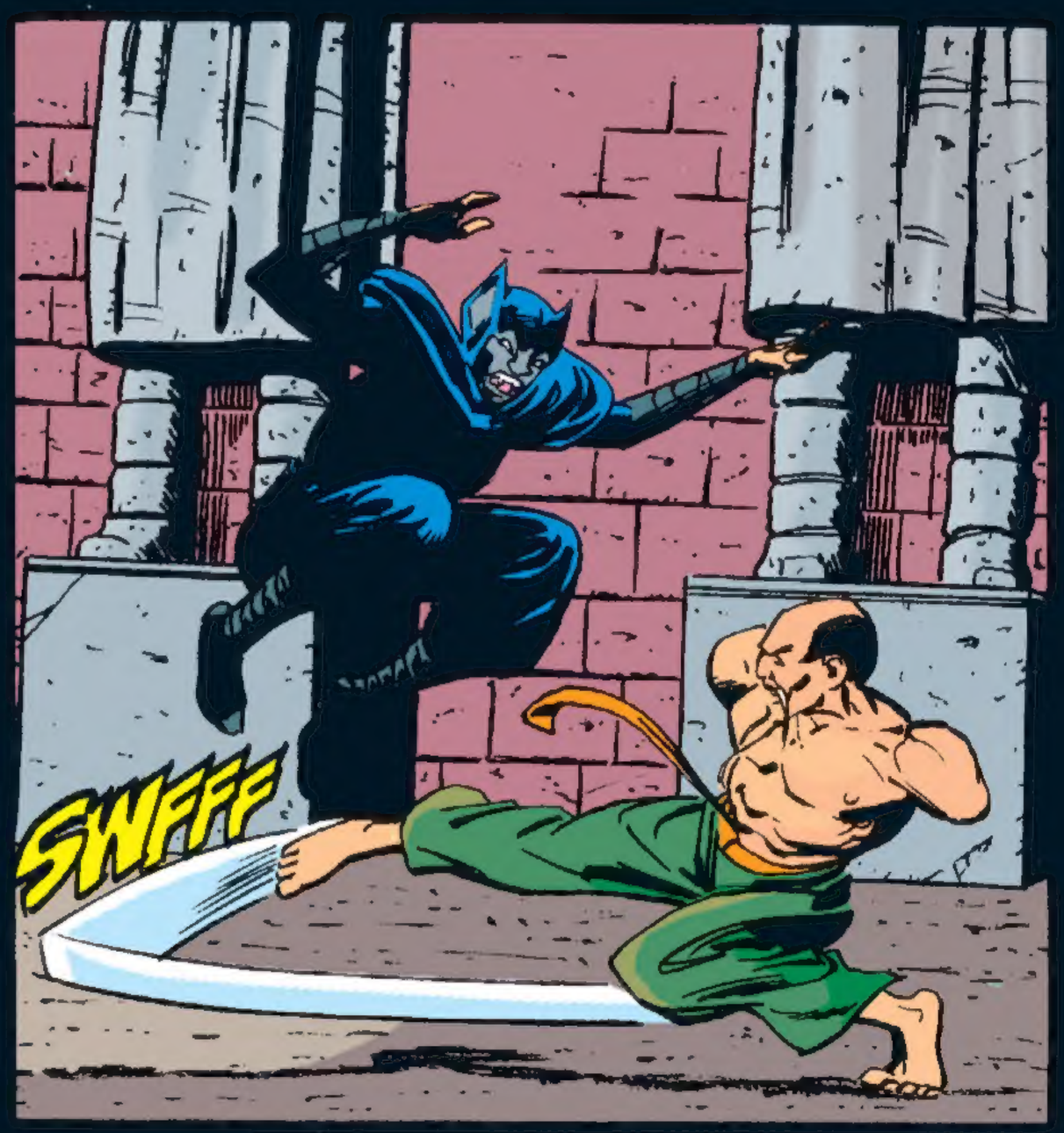
WHY ARE YOU--

SILENCE!

SHWAK

AND FIGHT!

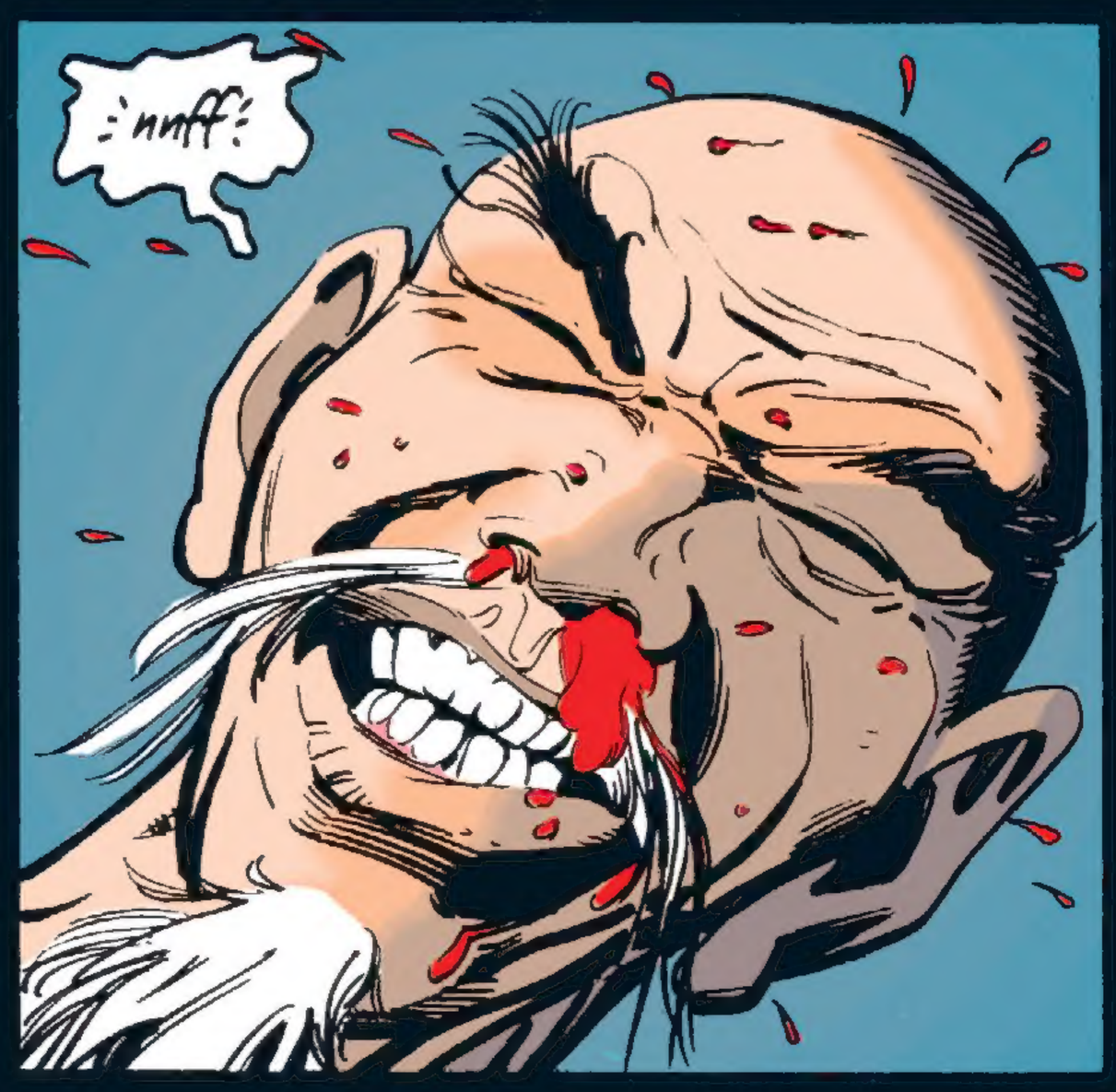

SHWHHH


SWFFF

TUP

SAPT

KRAK!


:'nnff!

KRNSCH

DONE.

THEN...YOU HAVE...YOUR *PROOF*, VAMPIRE.

NOW... TAKE YOUR... *BLOOD.*

YOU CALL YOURSELF *SENSEI*--*TEACHER*--AND YET *YOU* REQUIRE A LESSON--ONE *FINAL* LESSON.

THIS... IS HOW ONE-

--KICKS!

SHOKK

KIIIII--

--YAAAHH!!

YOU HAVE WITNESSED,

TELL THE SEVEN.

KRAKKARRLLGH

TOMORROW NIGHT...

HERE.

FOR ME IT ALL STARTED WEEKS AGO...

ONLY MILES FROM GOTHAM, BUT IT MIGHT AS WELL BE CHINA.

UNTIL I FOUND HER THROUGH THE COMPUTER LAST NIGHT, I NEVER SUSPECTED SHIVA HAD THIS PLACE...

I WAS AFRAID I MIGHT HAVE TO GO TO THE REAL CHINA...OR JAPAN...OR INDIA...

WHAT'S KEEPING HER? SHE'S LATE...

...AND SHE SAID MY FIELD TRAINING WOULD BEGIN TONIGHT.

MAYBE I WAS WRONG TO COME TO HER.

AFTER ALL, WHAT DO I REALLY KNOW ABOUT LADY SHIVA?

SHE'S RUTHLESS...AND SHE KILLS WITHOUT REMORSE...SHE MAY WELL BE THE BEST FIGHTER ALIVE, MASTER OF AT LEAST A DOZEN FORMS AND WEAPONS...

...AND HONOR IS SACRED TO HER.

A PARADOX--BUT GIVEN THE LAST, COMING HERE SEEMED A GOOD CHOICE.

BESIDES, WHO ELSE COULD I GO TO? WHO ELSE COULD PREPARE ME...

...FOR HELL?

SHIVA.

YOU... BUT NOT IN YOUR TRUE GUISE...

IT IS NO LONGER MINE. IT HAS BEEN USURPED... ALTERED...

PERVERTED.

AND NOW YOU WANT IT BACK.

BUT YOU ARE NOT READY.

I WANT TO REDEEM IT.

TRAIN ME, SHIVA-- TEST ME.

WHY SHOULD I?

FOR THE ONLY REASON YOU DO ANYTHING,

IT MIGHT PROVE... INTERESTING.

AS YOU STAND, YOU ARE NOT WORTHY OF ME.

NOT NOW...NOT YET...BUT ONCE I WAS.

BRING ME BACK.

AND SO BEGAN WEEKS OF PAIN, ALWAYS FLOWING ONE WAY--FROM HER TO ME.

SHIVA DELIVERED IT IN A DOZEN FORMS AND A HUNDRED TECHNIQUES, SOME BAFFLING, ALL SILENT.

SHE HURT ME AGAIN AND AGAIN, NEVER UTTERING A SINGLE WORD.

WHEN NECESSARY, SHE HEALED ME, TOO, IN THE SAME SILENCE.

TWO WEEKS INTO IT, I COULD FINALLY SEE THE BLOWS COMING, AND THEN EVEN SENSE THEM.

THE RESULT, HOWEVER, WAS ONLY MILDLY BLUNTED.

BUT THEN, JUST YESTERDAY, SOMETHING SNAPPED WITHIN ME...

...AND FROM IT, SOMETHING FLOWED OUTWARD...

...SPEED...

...STRENGTH...

...AND PRECISION, ALL PERFECTLY CENTERED.

IT WAS SHIVA'S FIRST AND ONLY PAIN--THE MOMENT IN WHICH I REGAINED MY CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE.

AND IN THE WAKE OF THAT MOMENT, HOLDING THE PAIN TO HER HEART AS IF IT WERE SOMETHING PRECIOUS, SHE FINALLY SPOKE--IN SAVAGE JOY.

EXCELLENT.

YOU ARE NOW READY TO LEARN.

I HAVE LEARNED. JUST NOW, I--

YOU *REMEMBERED* WHAT YOU *ALREADY KNEW*-- EARNING THE RIGHT TO *MOVE ON.*

TO WHAT?

IT IS CALLED THE *LEOPARD BLOW*, AND ITS MASTERY CAUSES *DEATH* WITH A *SINGLE* STRIKE

THEN IT IS A *LESSON*, LADY SHIVA...

...WHICH IS *BEST NOT TAUGHT.*

KRUNSCH!

YOU WERE *NEVER* WORTHY OF ME. YOU *REFUSE TO KILL.*

ALWAYS... AND THAT WILL *NEVER* CHANGE.

THEN COMING TO ME WAS AN *INSULT.*

WERE YOU WORTHY OF MY *EFFORT,* I WOULD *KILL* YOU.

YES.

WAIT.

PERHAPS I CAN DEVISE... *ANOTHER* WAY.

MANY WAYS.

MEET ME BACK HERE IN TWO NIGHTS.

SO HERE I AM. AND WHATEVER SHE PLANNED TO DEVISE, SHE SAID IT WOULD BEGIN TONIGHT... SO WHERE IS--

HERE.

AS SILENT AS A SLEEPING BREATH...

...BUT I SHOULD HAVE SENSED HER.

I'VE LOST EVERY EDGE.

TAKE IT.

THE... MASK OF TENGU...SYMBOLIC OF THE BAT SPIRIT...

IF YOU ARE NOT YET READY TO WEAR YOUR TRUE MASK...THEN AT LEAST ASSUME YOUR TOTEM.

AND THE FIELD TRAINING?

WITH ACCEPTANCE OF THE MASK, IT BEGINS TOMORROW NIGHT...

...WHEN YOU DON THE MASK...

...AT THIS ADDRESS.

YOUR MASTER IS *DEAD*...

...HIS HEART PIERCED BY HIS OWN *BREAKING* RIBS.

WHO?

THE ASSASSIN WORE A *MASK*- OF THE BAT-SPIRIT *TENGU*.

THEN THE MASK WILL BE *SHATTERED*.. AND OUR MASTER *AVENGED*.

GUN-RUNNING SCUM.

THEY'RE DEAD.

JEAN PAUL VALLEY- YOU HAVE *PROFANED* TWO *MASKS*!

EH?

SAINT DUMAS...BUT... WH-WHAT DO YOU WANT?

AS THE ASSASSIN AZRAEL, YOU WERE EXCOMMUNICATED-- EXPELLED FROM THE ORDER OF DUMAS...

YOU HAVE FAILED--AS BOTH ASSASSIN AND PROTECTOR.

YOU TRIED TO FLEE INTO YOUR NEW IDENTITY OF PROTECTOR--THOUGHT YOU COULD HIDE BEHIND A NEW MASK--

-BUT NOW YOU FAIL IN THIS, TOO!

N-NO...

NEITHER ASSASSIN NOR PROTECTOR, YOU ARE NOTHING!

C-CAN'T FAIL...

GUN RUNNERS... GOT TO PROTECT GOTHAM...

LIKE I DID FROM MEKROS... AND JIGSAW... AND ABATTOIR!

GOT TO... CRUSH... GUN RUNNERS.

THE ADDRESS SHIVA GAVE ME IS IN CHINATOWN.

LUCKY C S

ORDERS TO G

MANSAN

WHERE ELSE WOULD I DON THE MASK OF TENGU?

FIGURES.

A SHRINE... IN HONOR OF A LIFE'S PASSING... BUT I DON'T NEED THE CANDLES TO TELL ME THERE'S BEEN DEATH HERE.

I CAN SMELL IT...

AND-

AGH-K!

SHIKINKT

-FEEL IT.

IN HONOR OF MY SENSEI'S LOST ARMS, I HAVE EXTENDED MY OWN REACH.

YOU HAVE SLAIN THE MASTER--AND NOW YOU PROFANE HIS SHRINE...

DON'T KNOW WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT.

BUT SHIVA'S TRAINING HAS CLEARLY BEGUN.

YOU WILL NEVER ESCAPE THE REACH OF MY VEN--

...JUHH?!

DIDN'T SENSE HIM EITHER.

COULDN'T MEDITATE WHILE AWAITING SHIVA-NO INNER PEACE, MY SENSES DULLED...

THRAKK

...OR SHARPENED IN ALL THE WRONG WAYS...

CHUFT

...THE SHRILL SHARPNESS OF PANIC, EACH SENSE CONFLICTING WITH THE OTHERS, TOO MUCH PSYCHIC CHATTER, TOO MUCH ANXIETY OVER THE LONG TASK AT HAND...

NO HARMONY OR INTEGRATION.

NO SPEED OR GRACE.

SHRNK RNK RNK RNK

MY BODY KNOWS WHAT TO DO, BUT IT'S FORGOTTEN HOW.

MY BACK IS HEALED, BUT THE MUSCLES ARE SOFT AND LAZY.

DUFF

MY PHYSICAL MEMORY IS SHOT.

HE'S GOOD--STRONG, FAST, DEFT WITH HIS CHAINS...

SWF

WEE

SHFK

...BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO MAKE ME STRUGGLE THIS LONG AND HARD.

I'VE LOST FAR MORE THAN I REALIZED-- BASIC SKILLS, AUTOMATIC REFLEXES...

SWOOFF

CHOOF

GOT TO PULL MY MIND AWAY FROM THE END OF MY GOAL...

...STOP THINKING AND EXIST FOR THE MOMENT, IN THE HERE AND NOW.

RELAX AND TAKE EACH STEP IN ITS TIME--

WUMPT

--LET EACH MOVE FLOW FROM THE LAST AND INTO THE NEXT.

WHIK WAK WIKT

STAY WITHIN MYSELF AT ALL TIMES...

...EXPANDING THE AMBITION OF EACH MOVE ONLY WHEN AND AS MY SKILLS RETURN.

LEARN TO ABSORB ACCEPTABLE AND NECESSARY LOSSES-

SWUT-INKT

--TO ACHIEVE EVERY AVAILABLE GAIN...

HWOK

...AND TO PREVAIL, EVEN POORLY...

CHUOT

...BUT AT LEAST TO PREVAIL.

SHOK

HE ACCUSED ME OF KILLING HIS SENSEI... AND SHIVA SAID THERE WOULD BE MANY TESTS.

MANY DISCIPLES, ALL SEEKING VENGEANCE FOR THEIR SLAIN MASTER...

ACROSS THE RIVER- THREE MILES SOUTH OF THE BRIDGE- IN THE WOODS

LET THEM COME.

I NEED THE WORK.

YOU KILLED TO CONTRIVE THE FIRST TEST, SHIVA.

YES--AND YOUR PRIDE IN PASSING IT IS FOLLY FOR TWO REASONS.

FIRST, YOUR OPPONENTS WILL COME AFTER YOU IN ORDER OF ASCENDING SKILL--MEANING THIS ONE IS THE WEAKEST.

AND IT TOOK EVERYTHING I HAD TO OVER-COME HIM.

AT LEAST I STILL STAND, READY FOR THE NEXT... BUT THE SECOND REASON?

AS WEAK AS THIS ONE IS, HE STILL LIVES, HIS SEETHING VENGEANCE MERELY COMPOUNDED.

LET IT SEETHE-- I'VE BEATEN HIM.

FOR YOUR SKILL TO ATTAIN FULL FORM, YOU MUST BE WILLING TO KILL-EFFICIENTLY AND WITHOUT HESITATION.

THAT IS THE NATURE OF MY ULTIMATE TEST--MY TRUE OPPONENT--AND EVERYTHING I'M PLEDGED TO STOP.

THEN TO STOP IT, YOU MUST BECOME IT.

NO. BY ASSUMING THE MASK AND MANTLE OF THE BAT, I CHOSE TO OPPOSE DARKNESS WITH DARKNESS AND TO FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE... BUT ONLY TO A POINT.

THEN YOU WILL NEVER PASS THE REMAINING TESTS.

I WILL NOT BECOME MY ENEMY--AND I WILL NOT BE BURNED.

THAT, LADY SHIVA, REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

FOOL..

ONLY HE WHO *TRANSCENDS* DEATH THROUGH KILLING IS PROVEN *WORTHY*...

...OF FACING *ME*.

AND *YOU*-- YOU MERELY *SICKEN* ME.

YOU WERE NOT EVEN GOOD ENOUGH TO FORCE YOUR *OWN* END--

--AND SINCE YOUR LAST ACT IN *THIS* WORLD WAS *FAILURE*...

...YOU CAN PASS INTO THE *NEXT* WORLD-

--IN BONDAGE AND *SHAME*!

AUGH-K!

SHE'S RIGHT-I DID FAIL THE FIRST TEST.

BUT MY FAILURE WAS IN THE POOR AND PROLONGED STRUGGLE TO *STAY ALIVE*-

--NOT IN MY REFUSAL TO COMMIT *MURDER*.

KILLING IS THE DOWNHILL ROAD ON WHICH JEAN PAUL VALLEY HAS EMBARKED - HIS WAY, NOT MINE -- AND IT'S A COLLISION COURSE WHICH MUST BE SHUT DOWN.

THE NEW BATMAN -- THE MAN I CHOSE -- IS COMPLETELY OUT OF CONTROL...

...MAYBE EVEN MAD.

N-NO! THE VISIONS AGAIN...!

MY FATHER...AND SAINT DUMAS... BUT IT CAN'T BE! NOT AGAIN--!

BRUCE TOLD ME TO KEEP JEAN PAUL UNDER TIGHT SURVEILLANCE -- REPORT ON EVERYTHING HE DOES - BUT WHAT IS HE DOING?

WHAT DO I TELL BRUCE? THAT PAUL STOOD ON A ROOF AND WENT THROUGH CONTORTIONS -- GESTURING AT THIN AIR?

MAYBE IT'S SOME SORT OF MENTAL *PREPARATION*-- *HIGH-SPEED TAI CHI*-- AN EXERCISE PLANTED IN HIS MIND BY THE *SYSTEM*...

...SOMETHING THAT HELPED HIM FUNCTION AS THE ASSASSIN *AZRAEL*...AND MADE THE NEW BATMAN *DYS*FUNCTIONAL-- *RUTHLESS* AND *WILD*.

WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S *WEIRD*--LIKE HE'S BATTING AT *GNATS* OR *INVISIBLE* COBWEBS --AND I'M NOT SURE THIS TELEPHOTO LENS IS GONNA MAKE IT ANY *CLEARER*...

"...BUT IF HE *IS* PREPARING HIMSELF FOR SOMETHING-- WHAT *NOW*?"

DAMN THE SYSTEM! LEAVE ME *ALONE*!

THAT *WAREHOUSE*-- I'VE GOT *WORK* TO DO!

"THERE ARE *GUN RUNNERS*-- AND I'VE GOT TO *STOP THEM*!"

IS THAT *EVERY-THING*?

EXCEPT THOSE *STRIKER ASSAULT WEAPONS* WE COULDN'T *FIND*.

AH, YES...BUT *SOMEBODY* WILL PAY FOR *THOSE*, TOO...

AMC - AMMO 45 AOU-69

...EVEN IF IT'S NOT OUR *CURRENT* BUYERS.

YOU EVER LISTEN TO YOUR *VOICE* WHEN YOU START *FLIPPIN'* THAT THING? GETS *COLD*, MAN!

WHAT *IS* IT ANY-WAY? TOO BIG TO BE A COIN...

JUST SOMETHING I "LIBERATED" IN EUROPE BACK WHEN THIS MUNITIONS OPERATION WAS STILL RUN BY *LeHAH*-- BEFORE *SELKIRK* INHERITED IT.

YEAH, BUT WHAT *IS* IT?

WHO *KNOWS* WHAT IT MEANT TO *LeHAH*, BUT TO ME IT'S JUST A *CHARM*...SOMETHING TO FOCUS MY *ANGER*, LIKE WHEN ONE OF OUR *OWN PEOPLE* RIPS OFF SOME *STRIKERS* FOR A *SIDE DEAL*...

...AND MAYBE A *REMINDER*... OF THE *PAST*.

THE *VISIONS* ARE GONE, SCUM... AND YOU'RE DEAD!

WHAT THE--?

BRASH!

SHRUPUPUPUPUPUPUPUPP

CHT

THTCH

AHRR!

TPT

CHUT

THE GUNS-!

sting

GRAB A WEAPON!

tinkt

WAX HIM!!

THIS END UP

SKRRRRRRRR

K'CHAK

CLANK

BRAK AKA KAK

BAM AKAKAKAK

BRRRRT

BAM

BAOOM

BOOM

SAME OLD PAUL...

...AND MAYBE EVEN WORSE BY THE MINUTE.

FHADOOOM

SHRRRRUK

SHUNK

WEAK AND *EASY*, EVEN WITH YOUR *GUNS*, EVERY ONE OF YOU NOTHING BUT--

EH? WHAT'S *THAT*... ON THE *FLOOR*...

A *MEDALLION*... WITH THE SYMBOL OF THE *ORDER OF SAINT DUMAS*...

THE ONES WHO *PROGRAMMED* ME...TURNED ME INTO THE *ASSASSIN* AZRAEL...

...CURSED ME WITH THE *VOICES* AND THE *VISIONS*...

"...LeHAH'S MEDALLION...

...THE *MONSTER* LeHAH.

"...LeHAH--MASTER OF THE *SYSTEM*..."

WHAT'S THAT HE'S *HOLDING*?

WHATEVER IT WAS, THIS GUY'S *GOTTA BE STOPPED*- AND AFTER *MY* EXPERIENCE WITH SHIVA, I JUST HOPE BRUCE KNOWS WHAT HE'S *DOING*...

LeHAAAAH!

...AND GETS BACK BEFORE THERE'S NOTHING LEFT OF GOTHAM TO *SAVE*.

TUP

SHASHA

PIP

CHFT

THREE OF FOUR...

...BUT IT'S THE LAST ONE.

TUTCH!

wikt

PIP

PT

TPT

...THAT CAN KILL YOU.

YOU WEAR THE *MASK OF TENGU!*

YOU *KILLED MY MASTER!*

NO...

...BUT I WOULD BE *GRATEFUL*...

CHUP

SAPT

...IF YOU CONTINUED *THINKING* I DID.

HE ENDS THE TALK, FORCING ACTION.

SWUT

I'M FASTER THIS TIME, STRONGER, MORE IN FLOW.

BUT BEFORE I EVEN START MY MOVE, I KNOW IT WILL SUCCEED...

...MY HAND SWIFT AND SURE...

...AND STILL ATTACHED.

BUT SHIVA WAS RIGHT...

THIS SECOND OPPONENT IS BETTER.

SHRRRRP

A TRUE MASTER.

SHWSHHH

A SUPERB TEST.

SHWFFFF

SHWFFF

WHICH MUST BE PASSED, IF POSSIBLE--

--WITHOUT ASSISTANCE.

TCHOK

CHUNT

WITH NOTHING BUT MY OWN REACH--STRIVING FOR THAT WHICH IS THUS FAR OUT OF REACH.

--WITH HIS FEET.

WITH ONLY ONE BLADE NOW IN HAND, MY OPPONENT CHOOSES TO GUARD IT-

IT'S A MOVE I DID NOT EXPECT.

UHN!

CHUPT

AND IT WORKS.

BLASH

HE STILL HOLDS THE LAST BLADE-

SHRSHH

..THE ONE THAT CAN KILL YOU.

RUSH

SHSHH

IT'S SHARP ENOUGH TO SPLIT MY HEAD.

LIKE AN ACORN.

SKAKT

GIVEN HALF THE CHANCE.

KUNCH

HE GOT ME WET.

HE WAS BETTER.

BUT THIS FIGHT WAS SHORTER.

RUTCH

PLOOSH

PLUSH

PLSHH

PROGRESS.

EVEN THOUGH I NEEDED THE ASSISTANCE OF A ROCK.

AND THE END GOAL IS STILL NOWHERE IN REACH.

AND MY TRAINER FOR THE LONG HAUL...

...RUNS ICE THROUGH HER VEINS.

I THINK YOU'D BETTER GO... BACK TO THE OTHERS.

TELL THEM ABOUT ME.

PAP

REPT

TELL THEM I'M WAITING.

LADY SHIVA IS DEATH.

BUT I WILL CONQUER ALL OF DEATH'S CHALLENGES...

...AND EARN THE MEANS AND THE RIGHT TO FACE THE BAT-DEMON WAITING BEYOND.

LeHAH!

DEATH IS TOO GOOD FOR YOU, DEMON!

MY OWN PERSONAL TEST...THE ABYSS.

HE'S ALREADY MASTERED IT... TAKEN WHAT I ONCE HAD...

...WIPED ALL FEAR FROM HIS MIND...

...EFFORTLESSLY CUTTING THE RUSH OF WIND...DEFYING THE WEIGHT AND PULL OF GRAVITY'S DEATH...

...JUST AS I ONCE DID...

...BUT FEAR DOING NOW.

THE PHYSICAL MEMORY, ALL THE ELEMENTS OF BALANCE, THE UNTHINKING REFLEXES... ARE THEY STILL WITHIN ME...OR ONLY ON THE OTHER SIDE, ACROSS THE ABYSS?

AND DARE I LEARN THE ANSWER?

CAST THE LINE WITHOUT FALLING.

GAIN SECURE PURCHASE AROUND THE THROAT OF THE BEAST.

LEAP INTO NOTHING.

SLASH THE ABYSS, THE BODY OF A BLADE, PERFECTLY BALANCED, PERFECTLY CONTROLLED.

AND SHAKE THE LINE FREE WHILE DROPPING TO A PERCH TWO FEET WIDE.

ALL WITHOUT THINKING... WITHOUT FEAR.

IT TAKES A HUNDRED MUSCLES JUST TO SMILE... MORE THAN THAT FOR A FROWN.

AND FOR THE ABYSS...?

NO...

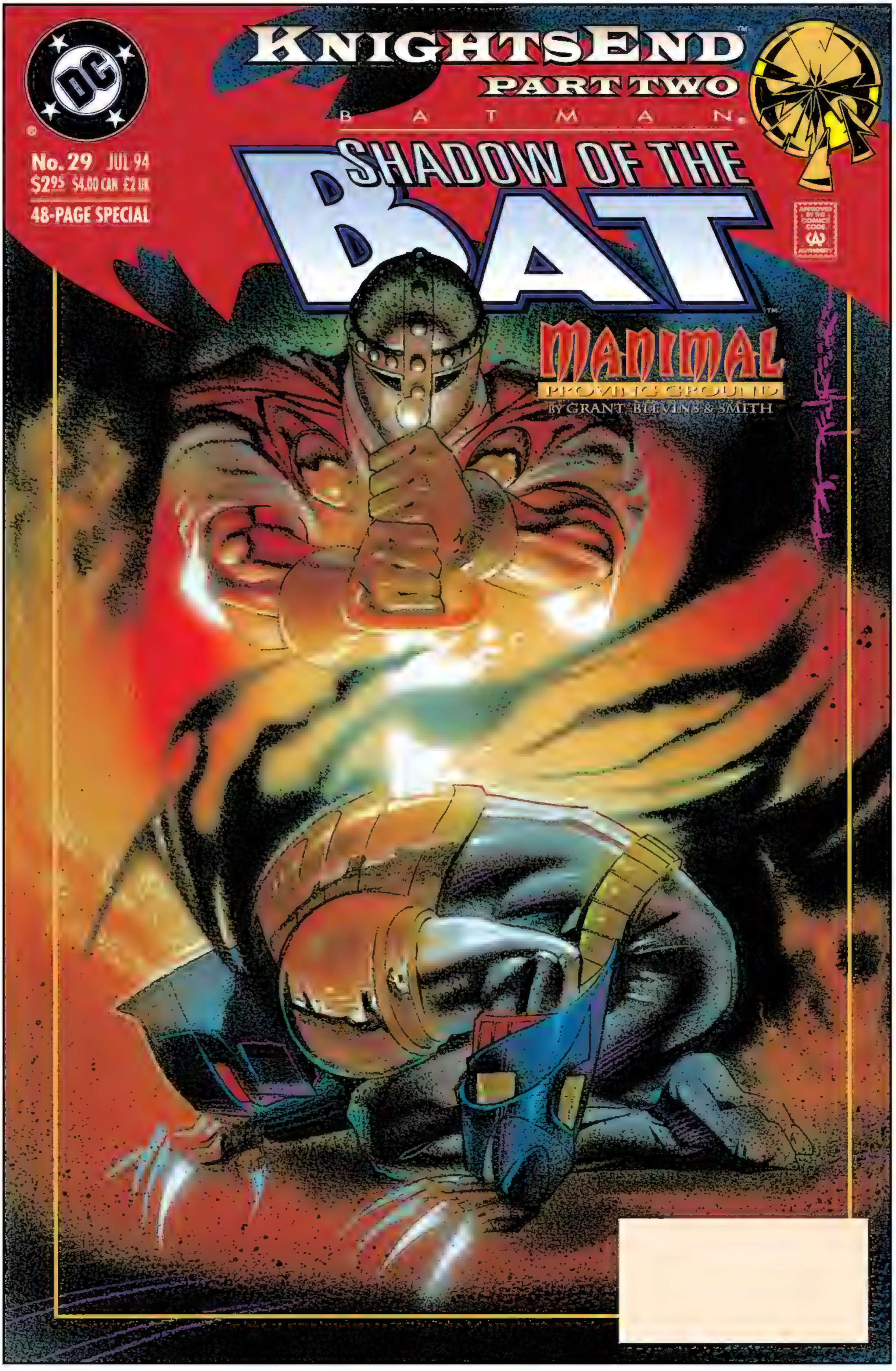
...NOT YET.

SHIVA IS DEATH, AND DEATH HOLDS MANY CHALLENGES...

BEYOND THEM ALL AWAITS THE BAT-DEMON WHO DEFEATED BANE...AFTER BANE DEFEATED ME.

AND I'M NOT EVEN READY TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP.

Cover art by **BRIAN STELFREEZE**



[redacted]

Gotham City 17 Miles

NO THOUGHT CLOUDS HIS MIND.

HE IS HERE FOR ONE REASON ONLY--

--TO REBUILD MUSCLES THAT HAVE LOST THEIR HARD EDGE, TO HONE REFLEXES DEADENED BY LONG, LOST HOURS IN A WHEELCHAIR--

--TO BECOME *STRONG* AGAIN--

--TO *BECOME* THE MAN THAT HE *WAS*.

SKWAK!

HE PAUSES, INSTANTLY ALERT--

BEFORE THE BIRD CALLS A SECOND TIME, HE'S MOVING --

HE PERMITS HIMSELF A WRY SMILE. ONLY A DEER-- THIS TIME.

BUT HE'S HIRED *SHIVA*, THE MOST DANGEROUS ASSASSIN IN THE WORLD, TO BRING HIM UP TO SCRATCH. HE CAN'T AFFORD TO TAKE CHANCES. HIS *FIRST* MISTAKE WOULD BE HIS *LAST* MISTAKE--

--AND WHAT WOULD *GOTHAM* DO THEN WITH ITS *ROGUE BATMAN?*

JEAN PAUL VALLEY HAS GONE OVER THE EDGE. TWO DEATHS ARE HIS DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY. LOGIC SAYS THERE WILL BE *MORE*, UNLESS THE CAPE AND COWL OF THE BATMAN ARE WRESTED *FROM* HIM--

--AND ONLY *BRUCE WAYNE*, THE MAN WHO GAVE THEM AWAY, CAN DO THAT.

A LOT OF THINGS HAVE TO FALL INTO PLACE FOR THIS STUNT TO WORK OUT RIGHT.

GOD HELP GOTHAM IF IT DOESN'T.

THE CITY STINKS IN THE SUNSET-- GASOLINE AND SOUR MILK AND STALE HUMAN FLESH.

DEAD SMELLS.

A SINGLE HAWK STOOPS--

--AND THE LAST OF THE DAY TAKES THE FIRST OF THE NIGHT.

AN OMEN.

THE *MASK OF TENGU* IS NOT IN THE CITY, AND FOR THAT HE IS GLAD.

THE *WAY OF THE WILD BEAST* IS THE WAY OF THE MOUNTAIN AND THE FOREST AND THE RIVER.

IT WILL BE LIKE FIGHTING ON HIS HOME GROUND.

FOUR HOURS' SLEEP, AND AS THE SUN STARTS TO GO DOWN--

--THE MAN IN THE COSTUME WAKES AUTOMATICALLY.

HE FEELS REFRESHED, FIGHTS BACK A QUICK SURGE OF PLEASURE. NO DREAMS OR HALLUCINATIONS... GOOD! PERHAPS THAT'S ALL BEHIND HIM NOW, AND HE CAN GET ON WITH HIS SACRED MISSION.

JEAN PAUL VALLEY!

SAINT DUMAS.

WHY DO YOU *PLAGUE* ME? HAVE I NOT *DONE* WHAT YOU COMMANDED?

SPEAK, CURSE YOU!

YOU ARE HE WHO IS CURSED! YOU ARE HE WHO HAS FAILED!

WHILE CARLETON LeHAH MURDERED MY LOYAL DISCIPLES, YOU FLOUNDERED AROUND LIKE A MAN IN QUICKSAND!

NOW YOU FLOUNDER BEHIND THE MASK OF THE BAT... AND AGAIN THE INNOCENT SUFFER BECAUSE OF YOU!

NO! IT'S NOT LIKE THAT!

DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? I'M DOING MY BEST! BUT IT'S SO HARD--

SO HARD...!

THAT'S RIGHT, GROVEL! WALLOW IN YOUR SELF-PITY! YOU WERE NEVER FIT TO FOLLOW IN YOUR FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS! YOU ARE NOT FIT TO WEAR THE MANTLE OF THE BAT!

LIAR AND HERETIC! YOUR FAILURE PROVES YOUR DISLOYALTY!

NO... NO...

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HEED THESE WORDS, JEAN PAUL VALLEY. THE *SEEDS* OF YOUR OWN DESTRUCTION *GROW* WITHIN YOU.

SOON THEY WILL *FLOWER*... AND BEAR BLACK, *EVIL FRUIT!*

IT HAS TO BE A *TRICK!* SOME SCHEME OF BRUCE WAYNE'S TO UNDERMINE MY CONFIDENCE IN MYSELF!

BUT NOTHING--NOT EVEN DUMAS HIMSELF--WILL DEFLECT ME FROM MY PATH! I *WILL* CLEAN UP GOTHAM--

--AND I *WILL* EXORCISE THIS GHOST THAT HAUNTS ME!

--HAS TO MEAN SOMETHING!

TOLTEC--ANCIENT ROMAN--MAORI... I'VE DREDGED THE CRAYS' DATA-BANKS FOR EVERY MAJOR CULTURE IN HISTORY--

--BUT DESPITE SOME SUPERFICIAL RESEMBLANCES, THE MEDAL DOESN'T SEEM TO FIT ANY KNOWN CATEGORY!

I TOOK THE PHOTO LAST NIGHT, WHEN PAUL FOUND THE MEDAL DURING THAT ARMS DEAL BUST. HE SEEMED TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS ALL ABOUT--WHICH SUGGESTS I SHOULD FIND OUT FAST!

I'LL FAX IT TO BRUCE'S APARTMENT--GIVE HIM A HEAD START AT FIGURING IT OUT.

PAUL SEEMS TO BE GOING CRAZY, SPINNING OUT OF ALL CONTROL.

HOW MANY MORE CORPSES WILL WE HAVE TO PICK OFF GOTHAM'S STREETS, COURTESY OF ITS ONE-TIME PROTECTOR--THE BATMAN?

I'VE GOT A GUT FEELING THAT THE QUICKER WE SOLVE THIS ONE, THE BETTER! BUT I'M GETTING NO-WHERE FAST.

MAYBE A *WISER* HEAD THAN MINE'LL KNOW...!

...ONE NINETY-THREE...

...ONE NINETY-FOUR...

RAP RAP!

EXPECTING TROUBLE?

ALWAYS -- AT LEAST, WHEN *SHIVA'S* IN THE GAME!

HE WORKS ON. A MAN WITH A MISSION, BARELY APPEARING TO EVEN LISTEN, BUT WHEN THE BOY IS DONE, HIS QUESTIONS ARE BRIEF AND TO THE POINT.

DID YOU RECOGNIZE ANY OF THE GUNRUNNERS?

'FRAID NOT.

CARLETON LeHAH?

I THOUGHT HE WAS DEAD...?

NO BODY WAS EVER FOUND--AND LeHAH'S CRAZY ENOUGH TO ATTEMPT A COMEBACK!

WHAT ABOUT THE MEDALLION? IT MUST HAVE SOME RELEVANCE!

I'LL TELL YOU IN A MOMENT. THERE'S SOMEONE I AM STILL EXPECTING.

NIGHTWING!

THANK YOU FOR COMING. I NEED YOUR HELP--

--BUT BEFORE I CAN ASK IT, YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT'S GOING ON!

THIS IS A MEDALLION OF THE *ORDER OF ST. DUMAS* --THE ORGANIZATION THAT SPAWNED *AZRAEL*.

BASED ON WHAT *ORACLE* TOLD ME, PLUS WHAT PAUL HAS LET SLIP, I'VE TRIED TO PIECE TOGETHER THE STORY...

A CERTAIN SECT BROKE AWAY FROM THE ***KNIGHTS TEMPLAR*** BACK IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY, CLAIMING TO FOLLOW ***DUMAS*** -- A "SAINT" WHO SEEMS NEVER TO HAVE EXISTED!

"THERE ARE FEW HISTORIC RECORDS, BUT IT APPEARS THEY PROSPERED OVER THE CENTURIES AND AMASSED FANTASTIC WEALTH AND POWER AMONG THEIR RELATIVELY FEW MEMBERS.

"THEY DEVELOPED A WHOLE THEOLOGY AROUND THIS MYSTERIOUS DUMAS AND HIS FOE, THE DEMON ***BIIS***. AND TO MAKE SURE THE ORDER'S STRICT RULES WERE KEPT, THEY CAME UP WITH THEIR VERY OWN VERSION OF A COP--

"--AZRAEL, THE SO-CALLED ***AVENGING ANGEL!***

"INDOCTRINATED FROM BIRTH BY SUBLIMINAL ***HYPNOTIC COMMANDS***, AZRAEL WAS A HUMAN MACHINE FOR ***PUNISHMENT*** AND ***DEATH*** -- A POSITION HANDED DOWN OVER THE CENTURIES FROM FATHER TO SON --"

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--FINALLY ENDING UP WITH *JEAN PAUL VALLEY!*

AND YOU CHOSE *HIM* OVER *ME* TO CARRY THE MANTLE OF THE BAT? A PROGRAMMED *MURDERER?*

IF I'D KNOWN, MY FEELINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN *MORE* HURT THAN THEY WERE!

IF I HAD KNOWN, DO YOU THINK I'D HAVE *DONE* IT?

NOW I'M ASKING... CAN I COUNT ON YOUR HELP?

YOU KNOW IT.

YEAH!

ONE FOR ALL...!

MORE THAN ANYTHING, PAUL-- AS AZRAEL--WANTS *REVENGE* ON THE MAN WHO SLEW HIS FATHER. IF HE GETS TO THAT MAN, MURDER MAY BE THE *LEAST* OF WHAT HAPPENS!

IF I'M GOING TO STOP HIM, I NEED TO KNOW HIS EVERY MOVE. I WANT YOU TWO TO FIND HIM--FOLLOW HIM-- AND REPORT BACK TO ME!

"AND IF THINGS DON'T WORKOUT, I CAN PROBABLY MAKE A SHREWD GUESS AT WHERE THIS IS ALL GOING TO END UP...!"

OTHAM CITY LIMITS

SO HE HAD A VISION. SO WHAT?

WHO CARES IF IT WAS REAL OR A HALLUCINATION, OR ANOTHER OF *THE SYSTEM'S* INEXHAUSTIBLE TRICKS? WHAT DOES IT MATTER, WHEN THE CITY LIGHTS BECKON AND HE THRILLS TO THE SEDUCTION OF THE NIGHT?

HE FEELS AS IF HE'S WALKING A RAZOR'S EDGE.

AND HE *LIKES* IT.

YEAH?

RUDY ELZEN? I HAVE A DEAL TO OFFER YOU.

WHO *IS* THIS? HOW THE HELL DO YOU KNOW MY PRIVATE NUMBER?

I KNOW A LOT ABOUT YOU, RUDY. I KNOW YOU'D LIKE TO GET YOUR HANDS ON A DOZEN CRATES OF SEMI-AUTOMATICS -- AND I KNOW YOU'LL JUST *LOVE* MY PRICE.

MOHAWK PLAZA--THIRTY MINUTES. ALONE!

THE STRENGTH OF THE *TIGER*--

--THE SPEED OF THE *SERPENT*--THE EYE OF THE *EAGLE*--THE ENDURANCE OF THE *ANT*. THESE ARE THE FIRST FOUR ATTRIBUTES OF THE *WAY OF THE WILD BEAST*.

THEY WILL ENSURE HE WINS THE COMING CONFRONTATION.

BUT IT IS THE *FIFTH* ATTRIBUTE THAT MAKES HIM TAKE PRE-CAUTIONS ANYWAY...

...THE *CUNNING* OF THE *FOX*.

PAUL FOLLOWS NO REGULAR PATTERN, BUT THERE ARE A COUPLE OF PLACES HE SOMETIMES TOUCHES BASE.

WE'LL CHECK THEM FIRST!

TIME FOR A QUICK DIVERSION...?

NO MORE TALK. THE SAME THOUGHTS RUN THROUGH TWO MINDS...

TAKE NO UNNECESSARY RISKS.

DO THE JOB EFFICIENTLY, WITH THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM OF VIOLENCE.

AND IF THEY WANT TO PLAY ROUGH--

--MAKE SURE *YOU* PLAY ROUGHER!

NICE MOVES.

DITTO.

I GUESS WE HAD THE SAME TEACHER.

YEAH. THE BEST!

KOK-TOOC

HEYY--!

THOUGHT I SAID ALONE, RUDY

Y-YOU!

ME. AND AS YOU CAN PROBABLY GUESS, THERE ARE NO GUNS-- ALTHOUGH YOUR GREED MADE YOU SHOW TO FIND OUT!

WHAT DO YOU WANT...?

CARLETON LeHAH, RUDY, AND I WANT HIM BAD!

YOU'RE CRAZY, MAN! AIN'T NOBODY HEARD OF LeHAH IN MONTHS! HE AIN'T A PLAYER IN THIS TOWN NO MORE!

LIAR!

THWAK!

I'M WARNING YOU, RUDY--

NO, BATMAN, I'M WARNIN' YOU! YOU THINK YOU WERE SMART, GETTIN' ME UP HERE--

--YOU AIN'T THE ONLY CLEVER GUY AROUND!

EVEN AS HE CURSES HIMSELF FOR HIS COMPLACENCY, HIS BODY IS SWAYING AWAY FROM THAT TERRIBLE HAMMER.

THEN THE OTHER TAKES HIM BEHIND THE KNEES AND THERE'S NO MORE TIME AND NO PLACE LEFT TO GO--

--AS EIGHT POUNDS OF TEMPERED STEEL SMASHES INTO HIS BACK!

MASKS--

HE KNOWS THEM WELL, AND THEIR DARK PURPOSE--TO HIDE THE MAN WITHIN, TO LET HIM DISAPPEAR--

--POSSESSED BY THE SPIRIT OF THE MASK.

THE *MASK OF TENGU* IS NOT THE MASK OF THE BAT, BUT AS SHIVA SAID, IT WOULD SERVE THE SAME PURPOSE--

--ALLOW *BRUCE WAYNE* AND HIS PROBLEM-RIDDEN LIFE TO EBB AWAY--

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--AND REACTIVATE THE *SPIRIT* OF THE BAT!

--WHILE THE TALENTS THAT HE'D SPENT A LIFE PERFECTING COULD BREAK THROUGH ONCE AGAIN--

NO THOUGHTS CLOUD HIS MIND.

HE HAS NO TIME TO THINK, OR PLAN, OR EVEN DOUBT. HE HAS NO PARTNER, NO TRICKS, NO BAT-LINE, NO UTILITY BELT TO HELP HIM.

HE HAS ONLY HIMSELF.

MUSCLES BUNCH, TENSE, TIGHTEN, SPRING!

FOOT SLIPS -- WEIGHT SHIFTS -- DUCK AND JUMP!

IS IT TRUE WHAT THEY SAY--YOU CAN NEVER GO BACK? THAT ONCE THE GLORY DAYS PASS, THEY'RE GONE FOREVER?

THINK OF THE FIGHTERS -- THE ENDLESS LINE OF EX-WORLD CHAMPS, REMEMBERED NOT FOR THEIR VICTORIES BUT BECAUSE THEY WERE BEATEN INTO BLOODY SUBMISSION BY TIME AND A NEW GENERATION.

IT TOOK HIM A *LIFETIME* TO BECOME THE BATMAN. CAN EVEN *HE* DO IT AGAIN?

STAND BACK! HE'S MINE--!

KRANCH!

SNAPP!

HE FEELS THE ADRENALINE PUMPING THROUGH HIS BODY--

THIS--

THE POWER AT HIS COMMAND--THE SOUND OF BONE BREAKING IN A CRIMINAL FACE--THE SMELL OF BLOOD--

THIS IS WHAT HE LOVES!

TAKE HIM! TAKE HIM!

HOW MANY CRIMES HAVE THEY COMMITTED, THESE DULL-WITTED PIGS? HOW MUCH *PAIN* HAVE THEIR UGLY HANDS DOLED OUT AS THEY SUCKED THE VERY LIFE FROM DECENT, GOOD-LIVING FOLK?

DO WHAT THE MAN SAYS.

TAKE ME.

BLOOD-SUCKERS, ALL--

I SAID, *TAKE ME.*

PARASITES!

TAKE ME!

BALDY-- SIMBA! S-*STOP* HIM! YOU'VE *GOTTA* STOP HIM!

UHH...I THINK--

NO. DON'T LEAVE YET.

I HAVEN'T FINISHED WITH YOUR LESSON.

SLAMM!

SHFF

FNK

YOU KILLED MY SENSEI. I KNEW YOU HAD TO BE GOOD.

NOW YOU ARE DEAD!

THIS IS HOW IT USED TO BE. ESCAPE FROM ONE DANGER--

--WALK RIGHT INTO ANOTHER!

30

THE MAN MOVES LIKE AN ANIMAL, TWISTING IMPOSSIBLY IN THE AIR--

YOU CANNOT DEFEAT ME! I SHARE THE SECRETS OF THE FOX AND THE SNAKE. THE ANT, THE EAGLE--

--FASTER ALMOST THAN THE EYE CAN FOLLOW.

--AND THE *TIGER!*

NO USE TRYING TO EXPLAIN HE DIDN'T KILL ANYONE, EVEN IF HIS FOE WOULD GIVE HIM TIME. SHIVA'S SET THIS UP BEAUTIFULLY--

--PROVIDING THE TRAINING HE NEEDS, MAKING IT A LOT MORE *REAL* THAN HE EVER EXPECTED--

--MAKING HIM *FIGHT*--

--OR DIE!

Y-YOU GOTTA BELIEVE ME, MAN! LeHAH'S HISTORY IN GOTHAM!

IF I KNEW ANYTHIN', D-DON'T YA THINK I'D TELL YOU? I S-SWEAR, MAN! I DUNNO NOTHIN'! NOTHIN'!

FEAR--

P-PLEASE, MAN--DON'T HURT ME...!

THIS IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT--SPREADING FEAR, STRIKING TERROR INTO COWARDLY CRIMINAL HEARTS.

AND NOBODY CAN SPREAD FEAR LIKE AZ--

LIKE BATMAN!

HE LANDS BADLY, A SHARP PAIN IN HIS BACK--

FOR AN INSTANT HIS MIND FLOODS WITH FEAR. HAS HE PUSHED IT *TOO* FAR--*TOO* FAST...?

BUT AS MANIMAL STRIKES, HIS BODY REACTS OF ITS OWN ACCORD--

THEN THEY'RE UP, AND FACING EACH OTHER--

ONE WITH A BLOOD DEBT HE HAS VOWED TO REPAY--

--THE OTHER WITH A DREAM THAT WILL MAKE HIM OR BREAK HIM.

ONE FIGHTING FOR VENGEANCE--

--THE OTHER SEEKING ONLY JUSTICE.

HE SHOULD FEEL WEAK, BUT HE'S STRONG.

IT'S NIGHT--

--THE TIME OF THE BAT.

CAN EVEN THE BATMAN COME BACK...?

TWO HOURS LATER, HE STANDS HIGH ON TOP OF THE CITY. HE FEELS THAT HE IS READY.

READY FOR THE *NIGHT*--

--READY FOR *JEAN PAUL VALLEY.*

HE STOOD HERE ONCE BEFORE, ASKING HIMSELF WAS HE READY? DID HE HAVE WHAT IT TOOK? COULD HE MAKE HIMSELF INTO WHAT HIS CITY NEEDED?

ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...

THE NIGHT AFTER THE BAT CAME CRASHING IN HIS WINDOW AND SHOWED HIM THE WAY--

HE STOOD HERE THEN, AND LOOKED DOWN AT THAT SAME DIZZY, TERRIFYING DROP. HE FELT HE WAS READY THEN, TOO--AND JUST TO MAKE *SURE*, HE'D SET HIMSELF ONE *FINAL* TEST--

IF HE PASSED IT, TOMORROW NIGHT HE'D BE A *VIGILANTE*. IF HE FLUNKED--

HE DIDN'T EVEN CONSIDER THAT.

ONE MOMENT OF PERFECT SILENCE, NO THOUGHT TO CLOUD HIS MIND--

AND THEN HE FLEW...

FIVE HUNDRED FEET, STRAIGHT DOWN, THE NIGHT WHIPPING PAST, TEARING AT HIS CLOTHES, BITING DEEP INTO HIS SKIN AND BRINGING TEARS TO HIS EYES.

THEN HIS LINE--THE ONE HE DESIGNED AND MADE AND TESTED HIMSELF-- SNAKED OUT INTO DARKNESS AT THE ONLY MOMENT IT COULD--

TCHLAK!

TILL THEN, IT HAD ALL BEEN A GAME.

FROM TONIGHT, THE GAME GOT SERIOUS!

ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...

AND HE STANDS HERE NOW, FACING THAT SAME FINAL TEST. HE REMEMBERS EXACTLY WHAT IT NEEDS, BUT EVEN THOUGH HE THINKS HE'S READY--

--SOMETHING IN HIM, OLDER AND WISER, TELLS HIM **NO.**

NOT YET.

CONTINUED IN *DETECTIVE COMICS #676.*

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KNIGHTSEND™
PART THREE

DETECTIVE COMICS

BATMAN

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DIXON
NOLAN
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TOO MANY NINJAS

Chuck DIXON writer
Graham NOLAN penciller
Scott HANNA inker
Adrienne ROY colorist
John COSTANZA letterer
Darren VINCENZO ass't editor
Scott PETERSON editor
BATMAN created by BOB KANE

I HAVEN'T BEEN DOWN HERE IN YEARS. YOU SURE WE CAN STILL GET INTO THE CAVE FROM HERE, ROBIN?

UNLESS PAUL'S BLOCKED THIS WAY UP, TOO, NIGHTWING.

BUT I THINK HE'S BEEN TOO BUSY TO FIGURE OUT HOW I GOT IN LAST TIME.

YOU SAID HE HAS THE CAVE RIGGED WITH ALARMS.

NOTHING I COULDN'T BOLLIX THROUGH THE COMPUTER. SONICS AND LOW SPECTRUMS ARE OFF. I DON'T THINK HE KNOWS I CAN ACCESS THE MIGHTY CRAYS.

IF YOU SAY SO. COMPUTERS ARE *YOUR* THING.

THE BATMOBILE'S GONE. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN RELAX.

HE'S GOT ANOTHER WAY OF GETTING AROUND THAT I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIGURE OUT YET.

SO HE COULD STILL BE HERE.

CASE OF THE PROPHETIC PICTURES

HOOD OF THE MONK

DIARY OF INDIANA DRIVE

GAVEL OF JUDGE CLAY

YEAH. AND *THAT* WOULD BE BAD.

I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.

THE SOONER WE CAN GET THESE SURVEILLANCE DEVICES PLACED AND GET OUT OF HERE, THE HAPPIER I'LL BE.

THIS JEAN PAUL VALLEY GUY CROSSED THE DOUBLE YELLOW LINE A FEW EXITS BACK.

COULDN'T YOU OR BRUCE SEE THAT?

PAUL HAD SOME PROBLEMS, BUT BRUCE THOUGHT HE'D WORKED THEM OUT.

LOOK, BRUCE WASN'T EXACTLY *PREPARED* TO PICK A REPLACE-MENT.

NOT *PREPARED*? I'VE BEEN DOING THIS ALL MY LIFE. HE *TRAINED* ME FOR THIS.

INSTEAD HE PICKS SOME PSYCHO WITH A RELIGIOUS FIXATION. WHAT WAS BRUCE THINKING?

HE WAS THINKING YOU'D MOVED ON. THAT YOU WERE YOUR OWN MAN NOW.

HE DIDN'T THINK YOU'D WANT TO COME BACK.

WANT TO? NO, I DIDN'T WANT TO.

BUT I'D DO ANYTHING FOR BRUCE. I THOUGHT HE KNEW THAT. I--

HOLD ON. DID YOU HEAR THAT?

FOOTSTEPS.

3

SOMEONE'S MOVING IN THE MAIN STORAGE CHAMBER.

IT HAS TO BE--

IT IS.

IT'S HIM.

THIS MIGHT JUST END RIGHT HERE AND NOW.

FLY AWAY HOME, ROBIN.

NIGHTWING! WAIT!

4

"THIS ISN'T THE RIGHT TIME!"

OH YEH-HEH-HESS!

I LIKE IT! I LOVE IT!

BE BUSTIN' SOME CAPS, MAN!

THEN YOU'RE INTERESTED IN A PURCHASE?

KILL THE

TANYA SARAH

ULIA WAS HERE

OH YEAH. WE'LL WANT AT LEAST SIX OF THESE MUTHAHS AND ENOUGH AMMO TO PARTY WITH.

PAR-TAY!

5

FIFTY THOUSAND FOR SIX PIECES AND FOUR THOUSAND ROUNDS OF MIXED AMMUNITION. AND CLEANING KITS.

ALL IN *CASH*, OF COURSE.

HELL, THAT'S ALL WE *EVER* DEAL IN. GOT A HARD TIME GETTIN' RID OF ALL THEM NASTY FIVE-AND TEN-DOLLAR BILLS.

RAYMOND, GIVE THE MAN HIS MONEY.

SOL'...

AND I'D APPRECIATE IT IF THIS TRANSACTIION WERE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

THIS SALE WAS *NOT*, "*AUTHORIZED*" BY MY EMPLOYER.

6

WHO THE--?

AGHK!

OUT THE WAY--

MAN, YOU IN THE *WRONG* DAMN NEIGHBORHOOD!

GET SOME *HOT* ONES, BAY-BAY!

7

KILL THE PIGS

I THINK THAT WAS THE BATMAN, MAN!

HEY, I NAILED THE BATMAN!

DEMONZ

JULIA HUNTER

WHUH?

KWOK

OH GOD...

PLEEEEEASE.

I COULD HAVE CUT YOU IN HALF. BUT I NEED YOU TO TALK.

PLEASE DON'T

HURT

ME.

WHERE DO I FIND LeHAH?

DON'T LIE TO ME. I *KNOW* IT'S LeHAH BEHIND THESE ARMS TRANSACTIONS. I'VE SEEN THE MEDALLION. IT IS *HIM*.

HUH-- WHO?

I DON'T *KNOW* ANYONE NAMED LEHIGH.

AZRAEL... OR ONE WHO *WAS* AZRAEL...

NO...

YOU HAVE FAILED THE LINEAGE OF AZRAEL...

YOU HAVE STAINED THE MANTLE OF THE BAT WITH BLOOD.

YOU ARE A HERETIC... A CHARLATAN... AN IMPOSTOR...

NO!

YOU ARE THE IMPOSTOR!

AN HALLUCINATION! A PHANTASM CREATED BY THE SYSTEM! YOU DO NOT EXIST!

SO DIE!

(10)

DIE!

WHAT PENANCE IS THIS?

WHY DO YOU TORMENT ME?

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'VE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO--

--THIS?

IT'S HAROLD!

WHO?

YOU DON'T *KNOW* ABOUT HIM. BRUCE TOOK HIM ON AS A KIND OF ENGINEER. HAROLD'S A *GENIUS* WITH ANYTHING MECHANICAL.

YOU GUYS HAVE SURE MADE SOME UNUSUAL *PERSONNEL* CHOICES LATELY.

HEY, HE WANTS US TO *FOLLOW* HIM, NIGHTWING.

WE'RE COMING, HAROLD.

12

ANY OTHER ADDITIONS I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT, ROBIN?

JUST ACE. HE'S A DOG.

SORRY I ASKED.

COOL, HAROLD. YOU SET UP A MINIATURE WORKSHOP.

HE'S BEEN HERE THE WHOLE TIME PAUL'S BEEN IN THE CAVE?

SURE *LOOKS* LIKE IT.

AND IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S LIVING ON A YEAR'S SUPPLY OF ALMOND FUDGE BARS.

HE'S BEEN LOGGING ONTO THE CAVE'S MAINFRAME TOO. EVEN ACCESS TO PAUL'S NEW ENTRIES.

WHOA...

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A *SUBWAY* ROCKET?

SUBWAY ROCKE

150 BARS

THIS END UP

13

HAS THIS STATION BEEN DOWN HERE THE WHOLE TIME?

I GUESS IT HAS. MAN, *THIS* EXPLAINS A LOT.

LIKE?

LIKE HOW PAUL COULD BE OUT OF THE CAVE BUT THE BATMOBILE STILL BE HERE.

THIS BABY COULD MAKE DOWNTOWN GOTHAM IN *MINUTES*.

WE'D BETTER GET THE SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT SET UP AND GET OUT OF HERE. WE'VE ALREADY TAKEN TOO MUCH TIME.

SURE.

PAUL HASN'T GOTTEN YOU SHAKEN, *HAS* HE?

MAYBE I'M JUST THINKING WE SHOULD DO AS BRUCE ASKED.

AND IT'S NOT *VALLEY* THAT'S GIVING ME THE CREEPS.

ALL THESE CHANGES...

THIS PLACE DOESN'T SEEM LIKE *HOME* ANY-MORE.

14

GOTHAM BY NIGHT.

I CAN HEAR THE TRAFFIC DOWN ON GRAND.

THE HEAT OF THE DAY STILL RISES OFF THE STREET.

I'M HERE AGAIN. FACING THE ABYSS.

FACING MYSELF.

THIS WAS SECOND NATURE TO ME ONCE.

I WORE A DIFFERENT MASK THEN.

NOT THE MASK OF THE TENGU, GIVEN TO ME BY A WOMAN WHOSE SOLE REASON FOR LIVING IS MURDER.

15

SOMEONE ONCE TOLD ME THAT THE GREATEST SIN IS FEAR.

GOD HATES A COWARD.

HAVE I BEEN GONE SO LONG?

16

WHUZZ-- WHUH-- ZISSS--

WHUH?

WHUH-- WHERE AM I?

WHO'S THAT?

I'M GONNA...

WHO'S TOUCHIN' MY SHOULDER?

YAAAAAAAAAH!

TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT A MAN NAMED LeHAH.

YOU...

LOOK, I DON'T GOT *NUFFIN'* YOU WANT, OKAY? I DON'T *KNOW* NOBODY YOU KNOW, RIGHT?

THINK OF A WAY TO BE HELPFUL. I COULD LEAVE YOU HERE.

THE RATS WON'T EAT YOU ALL AT ONCE. MAYBE SOMEONE WILL FIND YOU IN TIME.

YOU WANT THE GUY WHO SOLD US THE GUNS? SURE, HE DON'T MEAN NUFFIN' TO *ME*. BUT I DON'T KNOW HIS NAME WAS LeHAH OR WHAT.

WE WASN'T *FORMALLY* INTERDUCED, YEAH?

HOW *DID* HE COME TO DEAL WITH YOU?

GUY NAMED CANDY. HANGS OUT AT THE STRIPPIN' POST. CLUB ON GIRARD AND DUKE.

HE HOOKED IT UP. THE MAN WAS HANGIN' OUT THERE. CASIN' THE BABES.

HEY! WHERE YOU GOIN'? I *HELPED* YOU, RIGHT?

YOU GONNA LET ME GO?

IN THE MORNING.

I'M GOING TO CHECK ON WHAT YOU TOLD ME.

UNTIL THEN...

TRY TO STAY AWAKE.

UH... UH...

NOT A HUNDRED PERCENT YET.

THE PHYSICAL MEMORY. THE REFLEXES.

THAT SIXTH SENSE.

STILL NOT ENTIRELY THERE.

LIKE RIGHT NOW.

I SHOULD HAVE FELT THIS COMING EARLIER.

THESE ARE THRALLS OF THE MASTERS I'VE YET TO FACE.

UP

HANNA BUYS HOUSE

KIRBY'S ACTION

SCIATIC PAIN AND PREGNANCY LINKED

GUNHAWK CAPTURED!

THIS IS ONLY A FEINT. A SHADOW PLAY.

20

THEY MAKE NO EFFORT TO SURROUND ME.

THEY LEAVE ME AN ESCAPE.

I'M TO THINK IT'S AN ESCAPE.

BUT IT'S ONLY A PATHWAY, A GAUNTLET, LEADING TO MY REAL OPPONENT.

AND TO FAIL IS TO DIE.

ANOTHER COMBAT SET UP FOR ME BY LADY SHIVA.

ANOTHER TEST FOR ME TO PASS OR FAIL.

MIDTOWN BYPASS.

I COULD BE MISTAKEN. THE DISCIPLES COULD MERELY WANT TO END THIS.

DITTOS

WALKER WAS HERE

RAID

NO ARCANE MARTIAL ART FORM.

NO DISPLAY OF PROWESS.

JUST SIMPLE MURDER.

COLD AND HARD AND FINAL.

BUSES

22

BAR

DEATH ALL AROUND. A STEP AWAY IN ANY DIRECTION.

THE GAUNTLET LEADS HERE.

TO HIM.

LIKE I *NEED* THIS AGGRAVATION. I GOT DEALS GOIN'. STUFF HANGIN' FIRE.

STRIPPIN' POST

GIRLS

NICKY JUST SAID HE'S IN TROUBLE. GETTIN' SOME HEAT FROM THE BULLS.

I'M SORRY YA EVER GOT A PORTABLE PHONE, MIKEY.

WHICH ONE OF YOU IS CANDY?

JEEZE!

LET ME GUESS...

YOU *LOOK* LIKE A CANDY.

OWW!

24

NOT SURE WHERE SHIVA IS FINDING THESE MASTERS.

OR HOW THEY'RE FINDING ME.

I KNOW BETTER THAN TO RUSH IN.

GAUGE HIS STRENGTH.

JUDGE HIS SKILLS.

LOOK FOR AN OPENING.

HIS REACH IS AMAZING.

UNNNH!

CAN'T PLACE THE STYLE.

TIGER CRANE.

THE GO-MAI DISCIPLINE.

DANCING MONKEY.

AUGUST SILENCE SCHOOL.

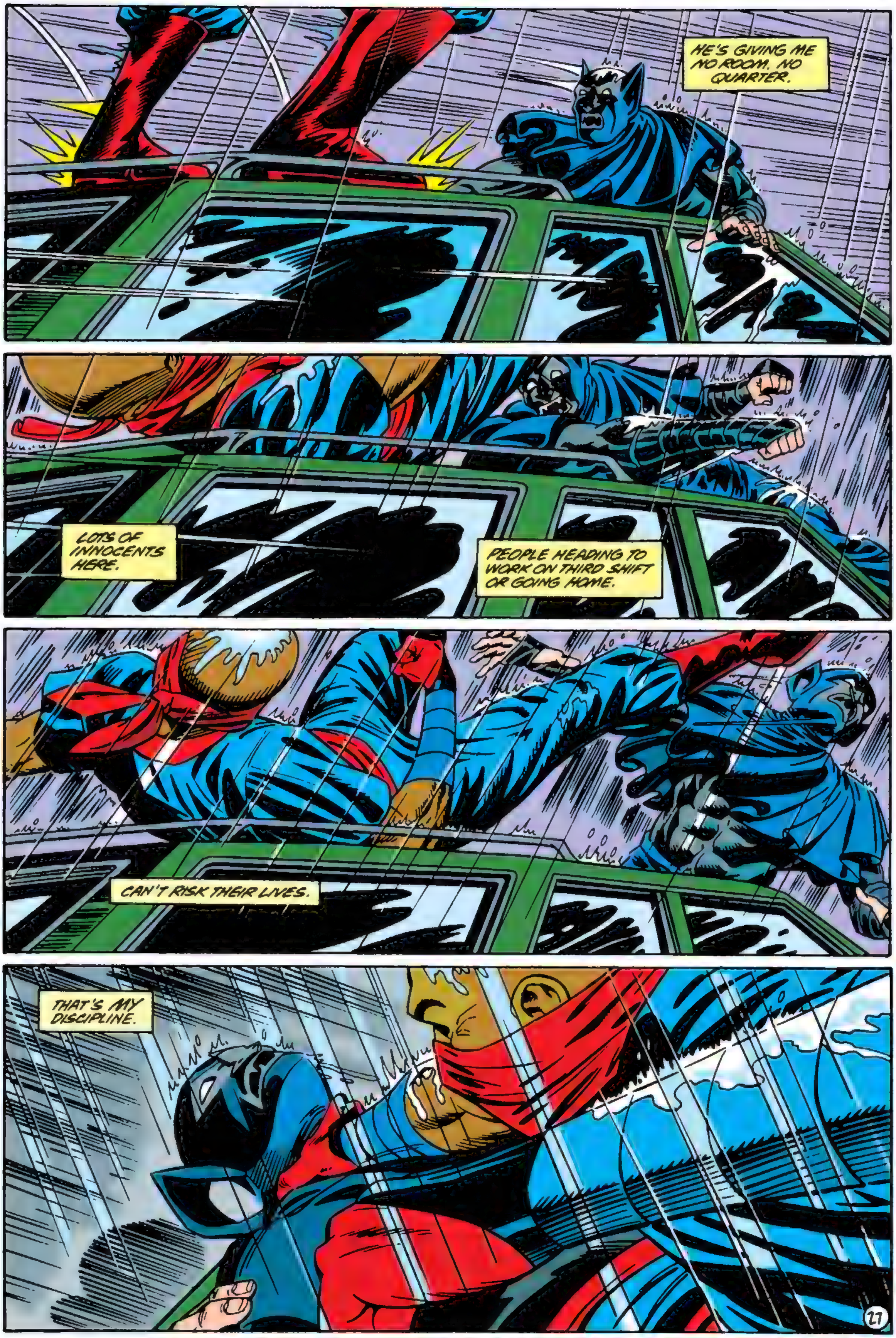
Sports Page

CAN THE ANALYSIS, BRUCE.

THIS GUY'S JUST TRYING TO PUSH YOU IN FRONT OF A BUS.

ILIEX

26


HE'S GIVING ME NO ROOM. NO QUARTER.
LOTS OF INNOCENTS HERE.
PEOPLE HEADING TO WORK ON THIRD SHIFT OR GOING HOME.
CAN'T RISK THEIR LIVES.
THAT'S MY DISCIPLINE.
27

I--I-- DON'T KNOW WHY YA NEED *ME* HERE.

THINK ABOUT IT, CANDY.

WELCOME TO Trask Tower

IF YOU'RE LYING, THEN I'LL JUST HAVE TO GO LOOKING FOR YOU AGAIN. AND YOU'D MAKE IT *HARDER* NEXT TIME, WOULDN'T YOU?

PLOK

YA GOT *THAT* RIGHT.

YOU SAY YOU MET THIS GUN DEALER ON THE FIFTH FLOOR?

YUH-YEAH!

HOLEEE...

THUH-THUH-- THAT'S HIM...

SOMEONE WENT TO A LOT OF TROUBLE. THIS IS MORE THAN JUST MURDER.

28

PIANO WIRE. HE DIDN'T DIE QUICKLY. IT MUST HAVE TAKEN HOURS.

SOMEONE WANTED TO *TALK* TO HIM FIRST.

HUH-- WHO?

LeHAH.

HUH?

THE MAN WHO KILLED MY FATHER. HE DIDN'T DIE IN THE FIRE. HE'S COME BACK TO KILL *ME* AS WELL.

TO TAKE FROM ME THE DARK CITY.

I KNEW THE FLAMES COULD NOT CONSUME YOU...

LeHAH!

THROWN TO THE HIGHWAY OR STRANGLED.

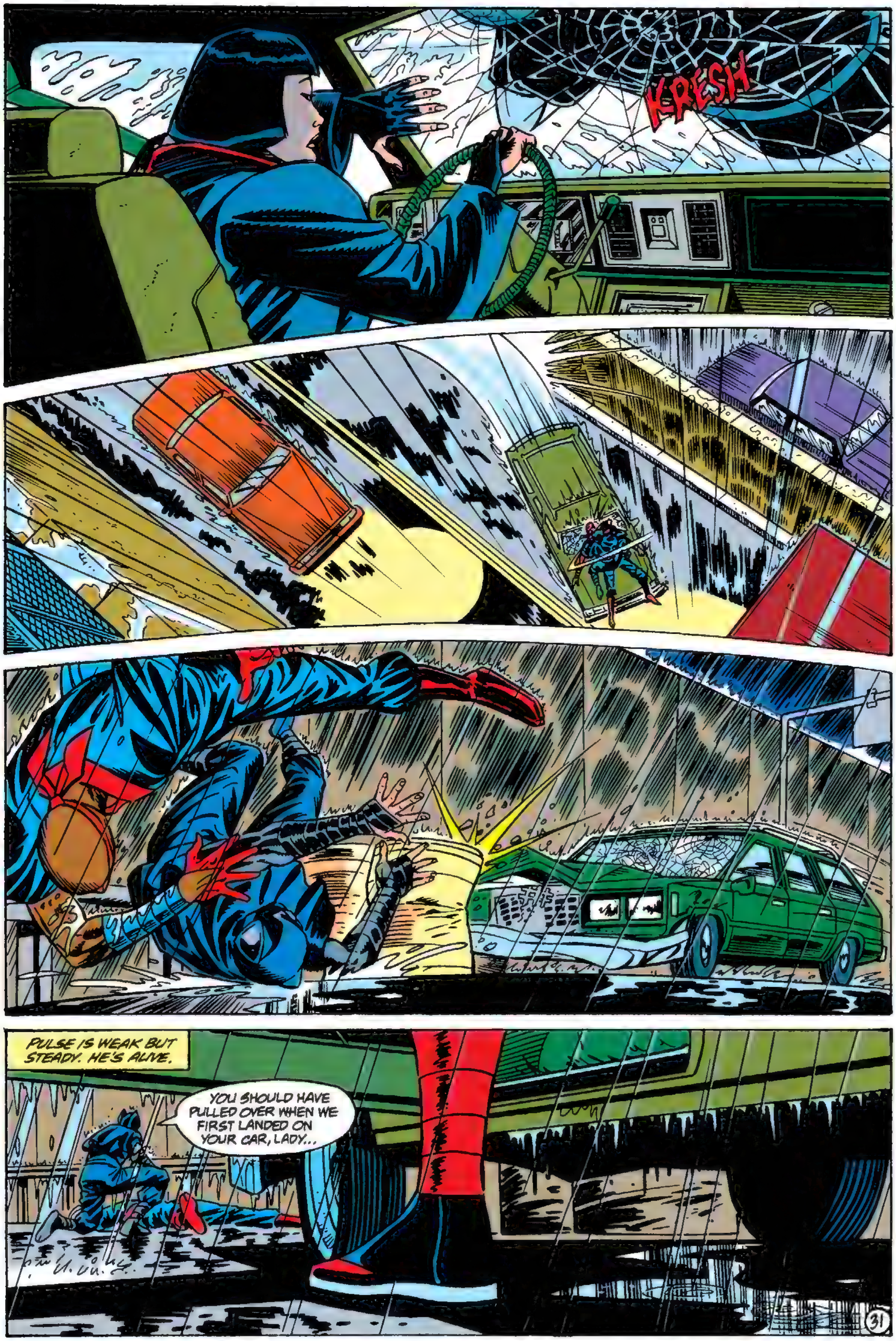
AN UGLY DEATH EITHER WAY.

CAN'T THINK ABOUT THAT.

CAN'T THINK ABOUT THE RISKS.

HELL IS FOR THE FEARFUL.

GOD HATES A COWARD.


KRESH
PULSE IS WEAK BUT STEADY. HE'S ALIVE.
YOU SHOULD HAVE PULLED OVER WHEN WE FIRST LANDED ON YOUR CAR, LADY...
31

...LIKE ANYONE *ELSE* WOULD HAVE.

NUMBER SIX.

HER ARTFORM IS OBVIOUS.

A BLOW FROM THAT FLAIL COULD BREAK A LIMB.

OR TEAR IT OFF.

ALL MY MOVES ARE CLOSER TO SECOND NATURE.

SHIVA'S ON-THE-JOB TRAINING IS PAYING OFF.

IF I SURVIVE.

A PROBLEM OF REACH AGAIN.

WORK INSIDE THE ARC.

TAKE AWAY HER ADVANTAGE.

ONE OF HER ADVANTAGES.

HAI!

COPPER TASTE IN MY MOUTH.

VISION RIMMED IN RED.

GET UP, YOU WEAK-KNEED SON OF A--

RT. 400 EXIT 1 MILE

34

SHE'LL LIVE.

BUT SHE'LL HURT FOR A WHILE.

THAT LAST ONE WAS PURE LUCK.

AND ALL THE LUCK IN THE WORLD ISN'T GOING TO HELP WITH JEAN PAUL.

SHOULD FEEL GOOD ABOUT TONIGHT.

BUT I DON'T.

I JUST FEEL EMPTY.

35

IT CAME FROM DOWN HERE? SOMEONE SCREAMING?

WHO YOU THINK CALLED IN A GUY SCREAMING IN *THIS* NEIGH-BORHOOD AT *THIS* HOUR?

YOU SWEAT THE *DETAILS* TOO MUCH, NEAL

EMPTY HORSES?

AND YOU *DON'T*, DANNY? WHO ALWAYS ASKS WHERE THE EMPTY HORSES RUN OFF TO IN THE COWBOY MOVIES?

YOU KNOW, LIKE WHEN THE INDIANS GET SHOT OFFA THEM.

SHUT UP, NEAL. I SEE SOMETHING...

WHERE?

STAY AWAKE... STAY AWAKE...

RUH...RUH... RATS...BUH...BUH... BATS...

36

AZRAEL...

YOU TRAVEL A ROAD WITH NO END.

ST. DUMAS...

YOU FOUND THE COIN. IT IS NOT WHAT YOU BELIEVE IT TO BE.

IT *CANNOT* BE LEHAH. YOU ARE A *FOOL* TO THINK IT IS...

BUT WHERE WOULD THEY HAVE GOTTEN THE MEDALLION...?

LEHAH DID NOT ACT ALONE. HE HAD SERVANTS TO *AID* HIM IN HIS DARKEST DEEDS.

HE WOULD NOT HAVE *SOILED* HIS HANDS WITH YOUR FATHER'S BLOOD.

YOU ARE *BLINDED* BY YOUR SELFISH AND STUPID DESIRES FOR VENGEANCE.

WHY DO YOU *SPURN* ME THIS WAY, ST. DUMAS? HAVEN'T I SERVED THE ORDER WELL?

ISN'T IT MY *DESTINY* TO AVENGE?

37

IT IS *YOU* WHO HAS SPURNED THE ORDER, HERETIC. YOU HAVE TAKEN UP THE MANTLE OF THE BAT AND FAILED AT *THAT* AS WELL.

YOU ARE NEITHER SAVIOR NOR AVENGER.

YOU'RE *NOTHING* TO ME...

DUMAS... SAINTED DUMAS...

I WILL PROVE YOU WRONG!

AND I WILL REDEEM MYSELF!

WHO'S HE *TALKING* TO?

CAN'T SEE OR HEAR ANYONE. LOOKS LIKE HE'S *ALONE.*

I'LL TELL YOU ONE THING...

BRUCE HAS HIS *HERK* CUT OUT FOR HIM.

38

Cover art by MIKE MIGNOLA

KNIGHTSEND
PART FOUR

DEVILS

CHUCK DIXON *story*
RON WAGNER *pencils*
RON McCAIN *inks*
DIGITAL CHAMELEON *colors*
WILLIE SCHUBERT *letters*
ARCHIE GOODWIN & JIM SPIVEY *editors*

YOU CANNOT *FORSAKE* ME, St. DUMAS!

YOU KNOW WHAT I *CANNOT* KNOW! YOU KNOW THE PATH TO THE SLAYERS OF MY FATHER!

YOU WILL REVEAL IT TO ME!

YOU CREATED ME TO BE AN AVENGER IN YOUR OWN IMAGE!

AND NOW THAT I CLOSE IN ON MY FATHER'S KILLERS, YOU TAUNT AND CONFUSE ME!

I DON'T NEED YOUR SANCTION OR GUIDANCE, BLOODY DUMAS...

I'LL FIND THE MAN I SEEK AND CONSIGN HIM TO HELL...

...WITHOUT YOUR BLESSING!

WHO'S HE TALKING TO?

CAN'T SEE ANYONE, ROBIN.

BUT I'LL TELL YOU ONE THING...

"...BRUCE HAS HIS WORK CUT OUT FOR HIM."

The mask of the Tengu.

A spirit's mask. A vain deception.

I'm flesh and blood with all the failings that come with that.

When I was Batman I would have leapt from here without a thought.

Was that courage or recklessness?

A virtue or a flaw?

Have I lost it?

Have I given it up, or was it stolen?

Without that edge, I can never wear the cape and cowl again.

I'll be Bruce Wayne until the day I die.

Would that be so bad?

...or I could die tonight.

They think they've surprised me.

A living death.

To know what I was and can never be again...

But I'm expecting them.

Another attack directed my way by Lady Shiva.

Another test of my skills.

This is all supposed to be a training exercise.

To pass, I only have to survive.

And all this is just a warm-up.

The real test comes when their Sensei arrives.

FOOM

I'll say this for him...

...he's got a flair for the dramatic.

DEATH STICKS

WHUH?

AW NO...

YOU SHOULDN'T TELL SO MANY OF YOUR FRIENDS WHERE YOU GO TO LIE LOW, CANDY.

TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU DIDN'T TELL ME BEFORE ABOUT THE GUNRUNNER...

HE DRANK SOME KINDA FRUITY WINE...

...HE BET THE HORSES HEAVY...

...SMOKED IMPORTS...

NOTHING HELPFUL, CANDY. THINK *HARDER*.

uh... uh...uh...

SOMETHIN' ABOUT... THE NAVY YARD...

THE GOTHAM NAVAL YARD. HOME TO SHIPS WHOSE NAMES AND THE BATTLES THEY FOUGHT IN ARE LOST TO HISTORY.

BUT, IT IS ANOTHER BATTLE THAT CONCERNS ME TONIGHT.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF THE DARK CITY. THE STRUGGLE TO REDEEM MYSELF IN THE EYES OF ST. DUMAS.

I WILL SAVE GOTHAM AND AVENGE MY FATHER AT THE SAME TIME. WHO CAN SAY THAT I CANNOT PLAY TWO ROLES AT ONCE?

PAST AND PRESENT SWIRL TOGETHER.

I ONCE SWORE LIEGE TO THE SWORD OF AZRAEL.

UNTIL I DENIED IT TO TAKE UP THE MANTLE OF THE BAT.

NOW THE CRUSADE BRINGS BOTH OF MY DEVOTIONS TOGETHER.

THE ENEMIES OF THE ORDER ARE HERE.

AND SHOULD THEIR FIST CLOSE ON THE CITY, IT WILL NEVER KNOW LIGHT AGAIN.

THE SYSTEM HOLDS ME IN ITS GRIP.

I SEE THE WORLD AS THOUGH THROUGH ANOTHER'S EYES.

THE INSTINCTS AND ACTIONS OF CENTURIES RUN THROUGH ME.

THEY HAVE BROUGHT WEAPONS TO GOTHAM.

I WILL FIND THEM AMONG THESE HULKS AND DERELICTS.

A BLINDING LIGHT.

SWITCHING HELMET OPTICS TO PHOTOSENSITIVE.

THEY KNOW I'M HERE.

THE FINAL BATTLE IS COMING.

I STAND ALONE. ONE MAN AGAINST DAMNATION.

LET THEM COME.

He strikes like a snake.

Each blow whispers by me.

But each one is a feint.

These first attacks are only preliminaries.

Even as I study him, he is observing me.

Gauging speed and technique.

Each of the masters sent to me by Shiva has been more deadly than the one before.

Have to determine his discipline.

His stare bores into mine.

As if he's trying to read my strength of will.

When he moves, it comes without warning.

When he lands, I know the overtures are over.

When he comes down...

...I won't be there.

I have an opening.

But it's a snare.

An Aikido discipline.

His every move led to getting those steel cable hands on me.

THE ACCUSATIONS OF ST. DUMAS.

THE CONDEMNATION FROM HIS LIPS.

I DENY THEM ALL!

IF THE DAY OF DESTRUCTION IS TO CONSUME ME, THEN IT WILL TAKE THEM AS WELL.

I HAVE NOT FALTERED.

I HAVE NOT FAILED.

I HAVE AVENGED!

NIGHT OPTICS OFF.

HEADS UP DISPLAY READS SIX HUNDRED ROUNDS LEFT.

COOLING SYSTEMS TO MAX.

LOVE THE ARMOR, BATMAN...

IS THIS THE ONE I WANT?

BUT MINE IS BIGGER.

THE BEST THAT MONEY CAN BUY.

HOPE YOUR WARRANTY'S STILL GOOD...

...'CAUSE THIS IS GONNA HURT!

SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW, NIGHTWING? DO WE KEEP TRAILING JEAN PAUL OR FIND BRUCE AND TELL HIM WHAT'S GOING ON?

WE FIND BRUCE, BUT MAYBE WE DON'T LET HIM SEE US.

HUH?

I KNOW WHERE HE IS.

HOW?

THE LAST FEW NIGHTS HE'S BEEN STANDING ON TOP OF GOTHAM TOWER. JUST STANDING THERE. WAITING.

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM WHEN HE LEFT THE CITY, ROBIN. HE'S GOING THROUGH A LOT OF CHANGES. AND IT'S ALL INTERNAL.

HE NEVER TALKS. THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT SO *HARD*. ON HIM. ON *US*.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO? YOU THINK HE'S IN *DANGER*?

ALL WE CAN DO IS BE THERE. HE'S GOT TO GET THROUGH THIS THE SAME WAY HE'S FACED EVERYTHING ELSE IN HIS LIFE...

"...ALONE."

TENGU...

YOU ARE A TROUBLESOME SPIRIT.

His voice is a harsh whisper.

SO MANY OF MY COMRADES HAVE YOU DEFEATED.

ALL THE MORE HONOR WILL BE MINE WHEN I KILL YOU.

Like to meet the guy who took out his vocal cords.

Pain like a hot blade in my back.

Shoulder is hyper-extended. Bone grates on bone.

YOU WONDER AT MY VOICE?

Bury the pain. Lock it away.

One hand free.

THE THROAT. A WEAK POINT OF SOFT FLESH.

I HAD A NYLON PLATE IMPLANTED THERE TO PROTECT MY WINDPIPE.

Not a hand.

A knife.

My hand is a knife.

A knife of tempered steel.

Can't let him get hold of me again.

Now, while he's disoriented...

Press my advantage.

Only one way to end it.

FIRE AIN'T GONNA CUT IT, BATTY.

I'M AS COOL AS A BREEZE IN HERE. TRIPLE THICK NOMEX AND HEAT-RESISTANT POLYMERS.

I CAN TAKE ANYTHING YOU CAN THROW AT ME, BATTY.

THE ONLY THING YOU CAN DO IS RUN.

UNNH!

THAT'S ONE POINT FOR YOUR SIDE.
NOW THINGS GET SERIOUS.
I'M GONNA...
...TWIST YOUR HEAD OFF...
...FREAK!
NO...
NO...

THE SYSTEM BECOMES A TORRENT NOW.

STRONGER THAN EVER-- A RAPTURE.

A BLOODTIDE THAT FEEDS MY RAGE AND DIRECTS IT ALL AT ONCE.

HE WILL FEEL THE WRATH OF AZRAEL.

HE WILL SUFFER THE JUDGMENT OF St. DUMAS.

HE WILL MEET HIS END IN THE DARK CITY.

THIS IS NOT THE ONE I SEEK.

HE IS ONLY A MINION.

NO!

RAPTURE AND DAMNATION.

They'll keep coming.

As I defeat one, another will spring up.

All for Shiva's amusement.

To appease some deadly desire of hers.

I've gotten everything I wanted from our arrangement.

It ends here.

The only way it can.

YOU HAVE WON, TENGU...

I AM DEFEATED. MY MASTER'S DEATH AT YOUR HANDS WAS... DESERVED...

THAT'S NOT GOING TO BE GOOD ENOUGH.

ONLY ONE THING WILL SATISFY THE MURDERESS WHO SENT YOU HERE.

The Leopard Blow.

A deadly blow that mimics the bite of the leopard.

Skull fracture. Nasal bones driven deep into the soft tissue of the brain.

Each finger a dagger destroying flesh and blood vessels.

BRUCE...?

They weren't supposed to see this...

DID YOU...?

HE *KILLED* THE GUY, ROBIN.

To be continued in ROBIN #8

Cover art by **TOM GRUMMETT** and **RAY KRYSSING**

CONTINUED FROM LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT 62:

DEATH'S DOOR

JUST WHEN I THOUGHT IT HAD GOTTEN AS BAD AS IT COULD GET.

NO!

CHUCK DIXON
STORY
TOM GRUMMETT
PENCILS
RAY KRYSSING
FINISHES
ADRIENNE ROY
COLORS
ALBERT DE GUZMAN
LETTERS
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL
ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNIS O'NEIL
EDITOR

BRUCE... DID YOU...?

HE KILLED THE GUY, ROBIN. DROVE HIS SINUSES BACK INTO HIS BRAIN.

LISTEN TO ME.

THE WHOLE WORLD IS COMING APART.

LISTEN TO YOU?

YOU HAND GOTHAM OVER TO THAT NUTCASE ALTAR BOY. YOU LEAVE THIS KID OUT TO DRY WITHOUT A SNOWBALL'S CHANCE.

NIGHTWING...

THEN YOU THROW EVERYTHING YOU'VE LIVED FOR ASIDE LIKE IT WAS NOTHING!

KILLING THIS CREEP DOESN'T MAKE YOU AS BAD AS THE SCUM WE HUNT. IT MAKES YOU WORSE.

BECAUSE THEY NEVER STOOD FOR ANYTHING.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.

THEY WERE NEVER GOING TO STOP COMING AT ME. THERE WAS ONLY *ONE* WAY TO STOP THE ATTACKS.

THEN IT'S TRUE.

LIKE THERE'S ONLY *ONE* WAY TO STOP THE JOKER? OR THE RIDDLER? OR BANE?

IT IS NOT A LINE, NIGHTWING. IT IS A DOOR.

A DOOR THAT OPENS ONLY ONE WAY. IT MAY NEVER BE REOPENED ONCE A WARRIOR HAS STEPPED TO THE OTHER SIDE.

WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT *THIS* TIME? WHY CROSS THE LINE FOR *THIS* GUY?

3

YOU HAVE DONE WELL, TENGU. YOU HAVE EXCELLED. ONE BLOW.

YOU HAVE FOUND THE SKILLS YOU SOUGHT. AND I HAVE RECEIVED MY OWN REWARD.

BLOOD ON THE HANDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT.

WHO'S THIS?

YOU WENT TO LADY SHIVA?

THIS IS SHIVA?

YOU'VE GOT SOME REP, LADY. THE BOY WONDER TALKS ABOUT YOU--

Hg!

YOU CA--

4

YOU KILLED THEIR SENSEI. AND THEN LED HIS STUDENTS TO ME.

ALL TO TURN ME INTO A KILLER. WAS THERE ANOTHER PURPOSE?

uk!

TO AMUSE ME. AND TO TEST YOUR SKILLS.

YOU ARE A DANGEROUS MAN NOW-- A WEAPON. FORGED BY ME. TEMPERED BY COMBAT.

HONED BY DEATH.

WORTHY OF MY NOTICE.

AND SO I FACE YOU. KILLER AGAINST KILLER.

ONE DAY.

FOR NOW, REVEL THAT YOU ARE THE MASTER OF GOTHAM.

BUT NOT THE WORLD.

SHE'S GONE?

SHE'S GONE.

OW.

BRUCE...

CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING.

WHY DID YOU DO IT? IT TURNS EVERYTHING INTO... A LIE.

uhhhhh...

HEY. CHECK IT OUT.

IT'S AH-LIVE.

HUH?

YOU SAW WHAT I WANTED *SHIVA* TO SEE. I COULDN'T "GRADUATE" UNTIL I'D KILLED ONE OF THE MASTERS.

AND THEY WERE GOING TO KEEP ON COMING AS LONG AS THE TRANSMITTER SHE HID IN THE MASK KEPT TELLING THEM WHERE TO FIND ME.

WHEN I'D GOTTEN ENOUGH TRAINING I GAVE HER WHAT SHE WANTED...

...AS FAR AS SHE KNOWS.

LET'S GET THIS MAN TO AN EMERGENCY ROOM.

6

"THEN, YOU CAN GIVE ME A STATUS REPORT ON JEAN PAUL."

BIG GOON IN SOME KIND OF ARMOR.

HE ALIVE!

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED HERE?

WE GOT SOME KIND OF FIREFIGHT GOIN' ON HERE AROUND THE MOTHBALL FLEET.

NOW GUYS DRESSED FOR A SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION ARE POPPIN' OUTTA THE WATER.

UNNNNHHH...

THIS ONE'S STILL BREATHING, HARV.

THIS ARMORED SUIT... SOMETHING ODD ABOUT IT..

...FIRE... FIRE... BATMAN...

MY GOD.

7

HE'S JUST WEARING THIS GETUP. WE'RE A LITTLE OUT OF OUR LEAGUE HERE, HARV.

ONE FOR THE TALK SHOWS, MONTOYA. SOMETHIN' THIS FREAKY DOESN'T FIT THE USUAL M.O.

BETCHA DOZEN DONUTS THAT OLD POINTY EARS IS CREEPIN' AROUND SOMEWHERES.

8

I ASSURE YOU THIS IS ONLY A MINOR SETBACK.

MINOR?

YOUR ENTIRE STOCK-- MERCHANDISE THAT WE HAVE INVESTED IN-- HAS GONE UP IN SMOKE, MR. SELKIRK.

I HAVE INVESTED AS WELL.

YOU MUST LOOK AFTER YOUR OWN INTERESTS.

YOU GAVE US... ASSURANCES, MR. SELKIRK. MY PEOPLE WILL NOT SUFFER THIS LOSS.

YOU WILL. IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER.

WE WILL BE SATISFIED.

CIAO, SELKIRK.

HOODLUMS. I HAVE GREATER CONCERNS THAN THEIR BOTTOMLINE.

BUT THE VIGILANTE BATMAN...

HE MUST BE DEALT WITH... TERMINALLY.

CLOSED

YOU HEARD HIS COMMAND. WE ARE TO WAIT HERE UNTIL HE SLAYS THE ONE IN THE TENGU GUISE.

BUT IT HAS BEEN MANY HOURS. HE SHOULD HAVE RETURNED BY NOW.

HE WILL NOT BE RETURNING.

I HAVE BROUGHT YOU A MESSAGE FROM HIM.

10

YOU WILL CARRY THE MESSAGE, LITTLE ONE. THE GAME IS OVER.
UNMMH ?
THE TENGU IS NO MORE.

BRUCE DIDN'T WANT TO COME BACK WITH DICK AND ME.

HE SAID HE HAD SOMETHING ELSE TO DO.

SOMETHING TO PROVE.

DON'T KNOW WHAT HE MEANT.

HE'S PROVEN ENOUGH TO ME.

HE RETURNED.

AND NOW THERE'S ONLY ONE THING MISSING.

12

AND THAT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY TO GET BACK.

GO ON, MAN. DO IT!

I DUNNO, MAN...

BUST OUT THE WINDOW AND IT'S OURS, MAN.

UH...

WHUUUUH...

"HE'S NOT JUST GOING TO HAND IT ALL OVER. BRUCE IS GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE IT."

13

I SURE *HOPE* SO. BIG LETDOWN IF BRUCE DOESN'T HAND THAT DEMENTO HIS *HEAD*.

YOU SOUND SO SURE.

SURE, I'M SURE.

HE'S THE *MAN*, ROBIN. HE'LL TAKE GOTHAM BACK FROM THAT ZEALOT. HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO *CAN*.

LIKE GOD'S ON HIS SIDE?

AZBATS HAS *THAT* GIG. AND LOOK WHAT IT DID FOR *HIM*.

IT'S *SOMETHING ELSE*. BRUCE *IS* THE BATMAN. YOU OR ME MIGHT STEP INTO HIS BOOTS SOMEDAY. BUT IT COULD *NEVER* BE THE SAME.

I MEAN, HE MIGHT HAVE A SUCCESSOR. BUT HE'LL *NEVER* HAVE A REPLACEMENT.

AND IT *DAMN* SURE COULD NEVER BE THAT SANCTIMONIOUS NUTJOB HE HANDED THE CAVE OVER TO.

WHAT ELSE YOU GOT HERE, HAROLD? I'M BEGINNING TO SEE HOW YOU GOT YOUR JOB.

I WISH I SHARED DICK'S CONFIDENCE.

14

WHAT HAVE WE GOT FOR TONIGHT, SARAH?

WHAT HAVEN'T WE GOT?

BULLOCK AND MONTOYA FISHED SOME KIND OF ROBO-JERK OUT OF THE SOUND AN HOUR AGO. SOMEBODY BLEW UP AN ARMS CACHE OUT THERE.

KITCH AND SALUCCI ARE WORKING A MULTIPLE HOMICIDE IN MAYFAIR. THE VICTIMS ARE ALL WEARING SOME KIND OF COSTUMES.

AND?

"AND?"

JIM, WE'VE GOT A WARZONE DOWN AT THE NAVY YARD AND SOMEBODY BEAT A DOZEN GUYS DRESSED AS NINJAS TO DEATH.

AND WE DON'T HAVE LEAD ONE. SOMETHING'S GOING DOWN AND THE POLICE DEPARTMENT IS COMPLETELY IN THE DARK.

IF YOU GET ANYTHING USEFUL I'LL BE ON THE ROOF.

ROOF

DO YOU KNOW SOMETHING I DON'T?

ABOUT YOUR "FRIEND"?

WISH I DID, SARAH.

TO ROOF

WISH TO GOD I DID.

15

RRYNG!

I CAN GET THAT, MRS. McILVAINE.

DAD?

TIM, DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS?

SORRY. ME AND SOME OF THE GUYS DECIDED TO STAY FOR ANOTHER MOVIE. I WON'T BE LONG. I HAVE TO WAIT FOR A RIDE.

I WANT YOU BACK HERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. WE'LL SEE ABOUT A CAR FOR YOU TOMORROW AND THEN THERE'LL BE NO MORE EXCUSES.

OKAY, DAD. I'M SORRY.

JUST SO IT DOESN'T HAPPEN AGAIN.

THIS IS THE ONLY DOWNSIDE TO BEING ROBIN. I HAVE TO LIE TO MY DAD.

I HATE IT.

WELL, LOOK AT THE BRIGHT SIDE...

CENT-

...YOU HAVE SOMEONE TO LIE TO.

LET'S GET TO WORK.

EVERY COP IN THE CITY MUST BE DOWN HERE.

WHOLE NAVY YARD'S RINGED IN. WE'LL NEVER MAKE THE CAR.

GOTTA BE ANOTHER WAY OUTTA HERE.

MAN. HOW'D THINGS GO SO WRONG?

WE HIRED ON WITH A CROWD OF *WHACKOS* IS WHAT WENT WRONG. THAT GUY DRESSED UP LIKE A FREAKIN' *TANK*...

AND SELKIRK. A STONE *PSYCHO*. NO MONEY'S *WORTH* THE KIND OF HEAT HE'S BRINGIN' DOWN.

AND I COULD GO THE REST OF MY LIFE WITHOUT SEEIN' THAT BATMAN GUY...

...AGAIN?

17

YOU WILL LEAD ME TO THE DEFILER.

GUN HIM!

LIE TO ME AND PAY IN PAIN!

LIE TO ME AND JOIN YOUR MASTER IN PERDITION!

18

STUH-STUH-STAY AWAY FROM ME, YOU FREAK!

YAAAAAAH!

SSSSS!

TELL ME HOW TO FIND YOUR MASTER. TELL ME WHERE TO FIND LeHAH.

LUH-WHO?

DO YOU THINK I CAN BE *LIED* TO? DO YOU THINK I CAN'T SEE INTO YOUR *HEART*?

GIVE ME LeHAH AND I WILL GIVE YOU MERCY.

"GIVE ME NOTHING AND THINGS WILL GET... *UGLY*."

19

NO...

NOOOOOOO

NO...NO...

HEY!

SHUT UP IN THERE!

SHUT UP!

BAM BAM BAM

THIS GUY'S SUPPOSED TO BE CATATONIC, RIGHT?

BANE-N.F.N.

I GUESS HE WOKE UP, HUH?

20

MUST BE A FULL MOON. EVERY LOONY IN THE BIN IS ACTING UP.

WHEN ARE THEY GONNA CLEAR THE HEADCASES OUT OF TEN BLOCK ANYWAY?

WHENEVER THEY GET ARKHAM REBUILT.

GUARD I GOTTA QUESTION FOR YOU.

NIGMA, Edward

GET BACK OR I'LL RUN THE HOSE ON YOU.

WELL, THEY CAN'T MOVE THEM OUT SOON ENOUGH FOR ME.

SOME OF THESE GUYS ARE CREEPY.

MURCIELAGO... MURCIELAGO...

HE HAS RETURNED...

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.

WAY LONG.

WELCOME BACK.

21

BUT ALL THE BAD TIMES OF THE LAST MONTHS ARE LIKE A BAD DREAM.

A LITTLE PREMATURE, ROBIN.

I WON'T *REALLY* BE BACK UNTIL I'VE TAKEN GOTHAM.

AND THAT BATTLE STARTS *NOW.*

SEE CATWOMAN 12 FOR THE NEXT CHAPTER OF KNIGHTSEND!

Cover art by JIM BALENT

HE STANDS ABOVE THE ABYSS...

...FACING HIMSELF, AT THE MOMENT OF TRUTH.

JO DUFFY-STORY
CHUCK DIXON SCRIPTER
JIM BALENT PENCILLER
RICK BURCHETT INKER
BUZZ SETZER COLORIST
BOB PINAHA LETTERER
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNIS O'NEIL EDITOR

FIRE IN THE SKY

THE TRAFFIC NOISES RUSH UP TO MEET HIM.

THE LIGHTS OF THE CITY LIKE COUNTLESS STARS.

AND HE KNOWS EACH ONE.

THIS IS HIS UNIVERSE.

DIXON WINS GOLD IN LUGE!

BALENT NEVER TO SKATE AGAIN

BUZZ WINS SILVER

AND ALL OF A SUDDEN HE KNOWS.

HE KNOWS.

IT'S ALL COME BACK TO HIM.

THE STRENGTH.

THE CONVICTION.

THE SKILL.

THE SHADOWED ALLEYS AND DARK STREETS.

THE ENDLESS NIGHTS, ONE AFTER ANOTHER.

THEY ARE ALL HIS.

THEY ALWAYS WILL BE.

4

ONE BATTLE IS OVER. THE BATTLE FOR HIS IDENTITY.

ANOTHER WAITS. THE WAR FOR GOTHAM'S SOUL.

AND IN THE END WHO WILL SAY WHICH WAS HARDER WON?

TIME TO GATHER HIS FORCES; TO MUSTER HIS ALLIES...

...WILLING AND OTHERWISE.

JEEZ...

...CAN YOU...

...LET ME DOWN...

...BEFORE I...

...PUKE!

VERY GROSS, BUCKO.

5

OW!

WE SEEM TO BE FORGETTING WHO'S WEARING THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR *NUTCRACKER* AROUND HERE.

I'M NOT REAL SURE HOW THIS THING WORKS. IT'S SO *TECHNICAL* AND ME BEING A *GIRL* AND ALL...

BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I NEED FROM YOU BEFORE I CAN GET YOU... BACK ON YOUR FEET.

I MIGHT ACCIDENTALLY PULL SOMETHING--

--OFF!

AAAAHH!

I CAN'T TELL YOU ANYTHING... SELKIRK WOULD...

...WOULD KILL YOU.

HO.

HUM.

YOU MENTIONED A NAME. SELKIRK.

TELL ME *ALL* ABOUT HIM. AND EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT THE CYBERNETIC ENABLER.

OOH...

6

DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE, CAT-LADY.

WE GOT YOU IN THE X RINGS, BABY.

'BOUT TIME, GUYS...

SHE'S RABBITING!

GUN HER!

BRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAK!

UH!

UH!

UHHH!

RABBITING?

I'VE NEVER RABBITED IN MY LIFE!

I'VE PUSSY-FOOTED.

I'VE CAT-SCRATCHED.

I'VE EVEN KITTYCORNERED.

BUT I DON'T *RABBIT!*

AGHK!

WELL, I'VE CONFIRMED THE BOSS'S NAME. THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO GO ON FOR NOW.

SO LONG, GUYS. IT'S BEEN A--

--UNNNH!

B

WHAT IS *HER* INTEREST IN ME?

THE CATWOMAN. *A SNEAK THIEF*, SIR. YOU'RE A MAN OF WEALTH, POSITION. SHE THOUGHT THERE WAS SOMETHING OF VALUE HERE.

LET SCHIFFER FINISH HER AND DUMP HER BODY IN THE HARBOR.

SHE'LL NEVER BE MISSED.

NO.

SHE WAS AFTER SOMETHING *SPECIFIC*. A HOODLUM OF HER RENOWN DIDN'T COME HERE ON A MERE *SUSPICION*.

I NEED TO KNOW WHAT SHE KNOWS. AND WHO *ELSE* KNOWS IT.

COME, SCHIFFER...

...BRING THE LADY TO THE CAR.

9

A MISSION. A CRUSADE.

A MAD OBSESSION.

TIES TO AZRAEL.

HE IS NO LONGER A KNIGHT OF ST. DUMAS. BUT THE PAST CONTINUES TO HAUNT HIM.

HE HAS A NAME: CERTAINLY A SERVANT OF LEHAH.

SELKIRK. THE CONNECTION IS THERE. TIES TO THE GOTHAM UNDERWORLD. TIES TO THE BATMAN.

THE ORDER WILL NOT RELEASE ITS HOLD.

THE DEATH OF LEHAH SHOULD BRING ALL THAT TO AN END.

THIRTY BLOCKS TO VENGEANCE AND RELEASE.

I DON'T LIKE THIS, MR. SELKIRK. TOO MANY COSTUMED FREAKS HANGING AROUND.

FIRST THAT BATMAN GUY NEARLY PUNCHES MY TICKET AND NOW--

I HAVE REAL DANGERS TO BE CONCERNED WITH, PATRICK.

PARKING
LEAVE KEYS IN THE CAR
NOT RESPONSIB

WE HAD SOME FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS TO SOME RATHER SHORT-TEMPERED INTERESTS.

OBLIGATIONS WE CANNOT MEET SINCE YOUR "BATMAN GUY" DESTROYED OUR INVENTORY AT THE NAVAL YARD.

MR. SELKIRK, YOU HAVE A CALL ON THE CAR PHONE.

HE WON'T GIVE HIS NAME. SHOULD I BLOW HIM OFF?

ONE OF THE ASSOCIATES I TOLD YOU ABOUT. STAY WITH ME, PATRICK. I MAY NEED YOUR ASSISTANCE.

AND TAKE THAT WOMAN UP TO MY RESIDENCE. WE'LL FIND OUT WHAT SHE'S ABOUT IN GOOD TIME.

IS THIS FOR REAL?

WHAT'D'YA MEAN?

LIKE, THE REAL CATWOMAN? I READ ABOUT HER IN THE MIDNIGHT INQUISITOR.

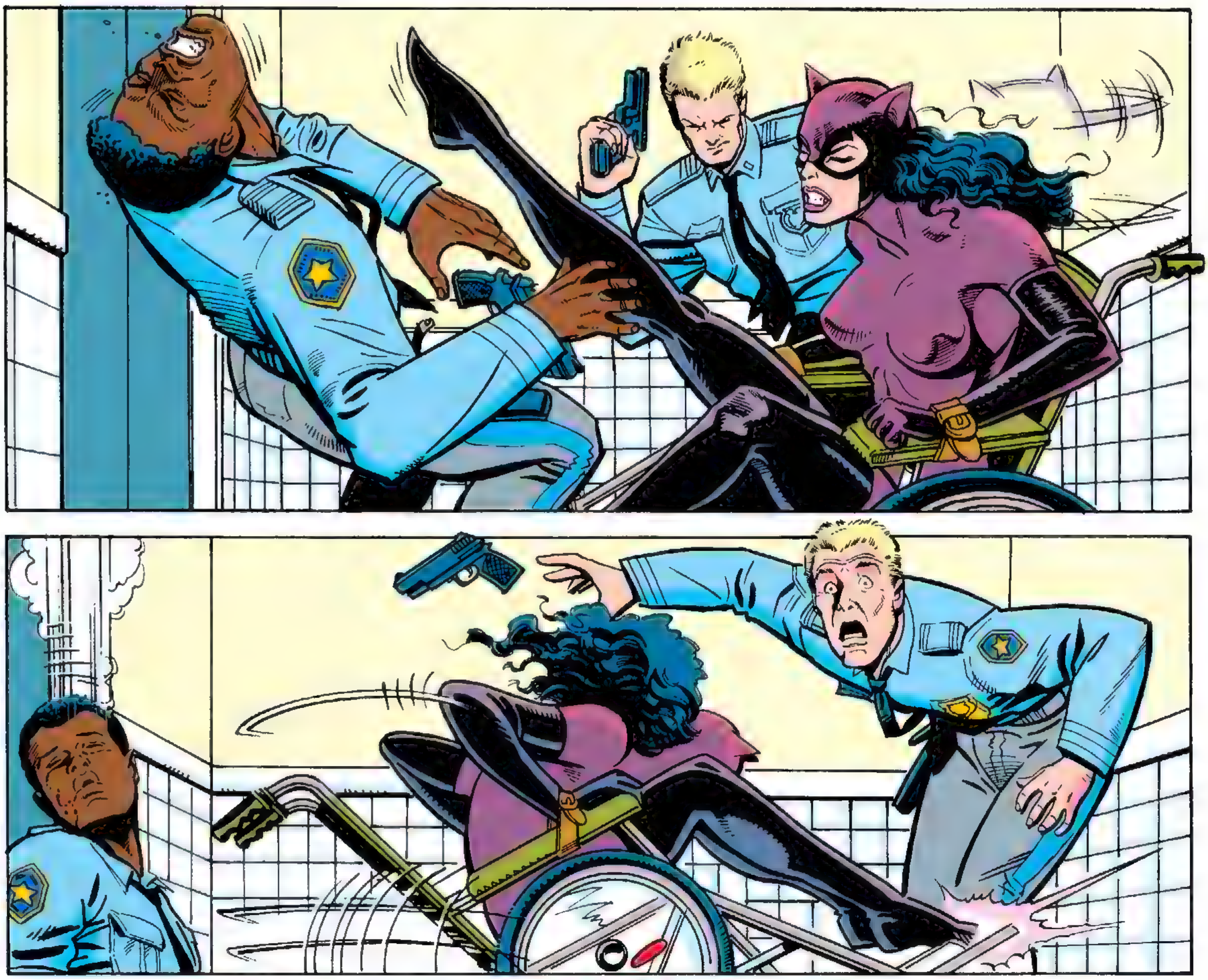
NO WAY. THE REAL CATWOMAN'S A BIG-TIME CROOK.

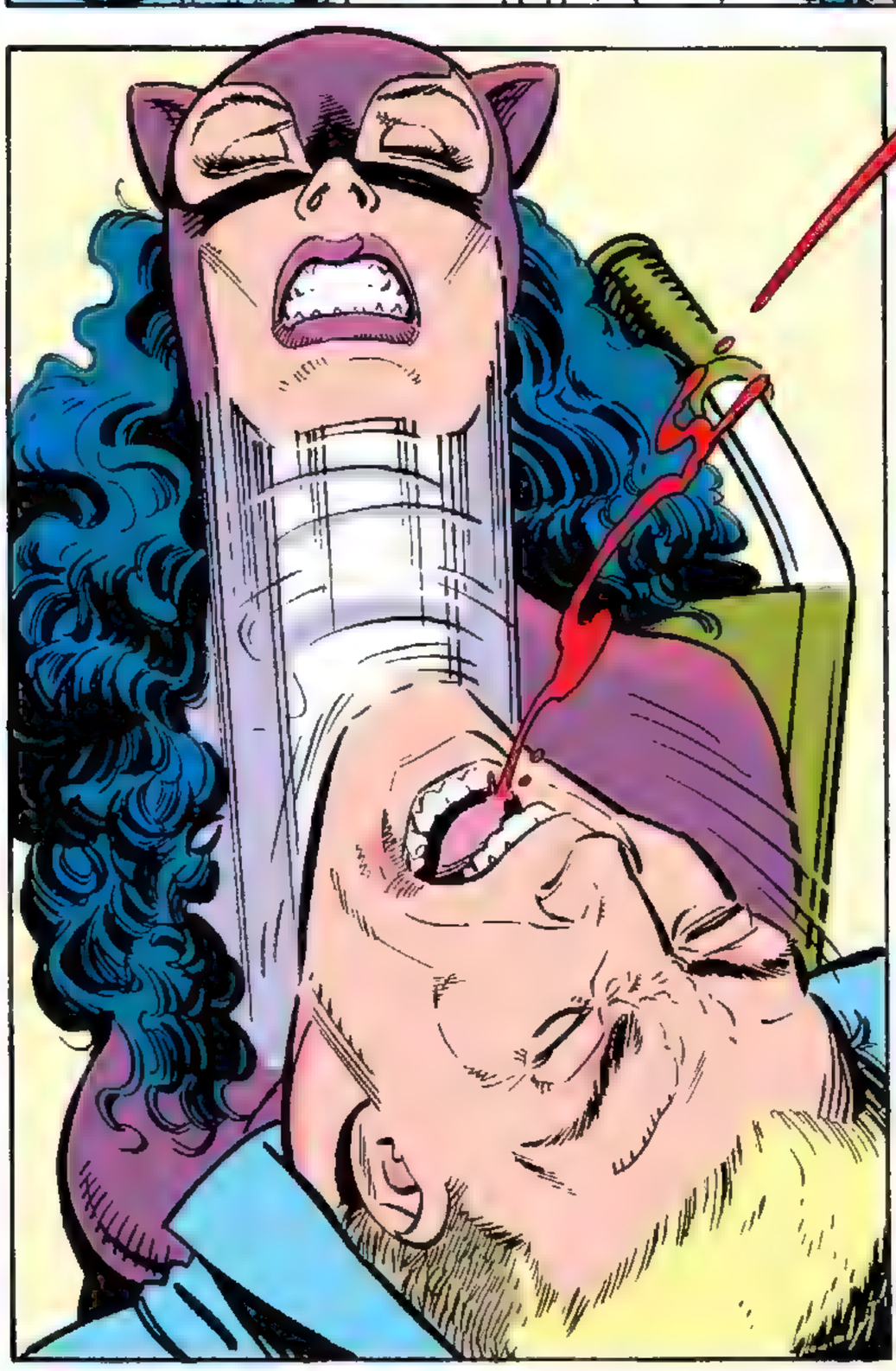
THIS CHICK DON'T LOOK SO DANGEROUS.

'SIDES, EVEN IF SHE WAS, SHE'S STRAPPED TIGHT.

WHAT COULD SHE DO?

12





ROLLING STONES ELEVATOR MUSIC.
YUCK!

DAMN!

OUR CLIENTS HAVE ISSUED US AN *ULTIMATUM*. THEIR WEAPONS SYSTEMS OR THEIR MONEY BACK.

AND WE ALREADY *SPENT* THE MONEY TO GET THE GUNS, RIGHT?

EXIT
TO STREET LEVEL

WHAT *ELSE* COULD GO WRONG?

ALERT EVERY GUARD! THE BATMAN CANNOT LEAVE THIS BUILDING ALIVE!

AND CATWOMAN?

ELEVATORS

14

"I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR HER. TELL HANSEN AND McKENNY TO KILL HER."

SELKIRK HAS THE BUILDING WIRED.

SOON AS I ACED THE GUARDS, THE ELEVATOR SHUT DOWN.

AND EVERYBODY'S...

IN FOR THE...

OVERTIME!

ROVER TEAM TO BASE. SHE'S OUTSIDE THE BUILDING. FLOOR FIFTY-ONE.

LET'S SEE HOW DUMB THESE GUYS ARE.

PRETTY DUMB.

15

ALL THIS BOTHER BECAUSE I PROMISED TO HELP SOMEONE.

BRENDAN O'BOYLE WILL NEVER WALK AGAIN UNLESS I GET MY PAWS ON THAT CYBERNETIC ENABLER.

THAT'S ME, ALL RIGHT...

...THE BLEEDING HEART HUMANITAR-IAN.

16

THE PENTHOUSE. ONE OF THE HIGHEST POINTS IN THE CITY.

THAT'S WHERE HE'LL FIND LEHAH.

A CREATURE OF THE PITS HIDING IN THE HEAVENS.

I REALLY THINK WE OUGHTA GET ON THE CHOPPER AND GET OUT OF HERE, MR. SELKIRK.

DON'T BE A FOOL, PATRICK. THIS BATMAN WON'T MAKE THREE PACES OFF THAT ELEVATOR.

DON'T YOU WANT TO WATCH?

17

FIRE. CLEANSING FIRE.

FOOM!

LEHAH WILL FEEL ITS EMBRACE.

A PREVIEW OF THE MONSTER'S ETERNITY.

THEN THE PAST WILL FALL FROM HIM LIKE SCALES FROM A SERPENT.

ONLY THE FUTURE THEN. A CITY TO PROTECT.

A LIFE BEHIND THE MASK OF THE BATMAN.

18

CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT THE CHOPPER?

YES--YES! LET'S GO TO THE HELIPAD. THERE'S STILL TIME...

YOU GUYS AREN'T GOING ANYWHERE...

...THIS ISN'T HAPPENING...

EAT LEAD, LADY!

EAT LITTER!

ALL I WANTED WAS THAT ENABLER, SELKIRK.

NOW THAT'S NOT ENOUGH!

19

NOW I WANT TO HURT YOU!

WHAT WERE YOU PLANNING TO DO TO ME TO MAKE ME TALK, YOU CREEP?

OR MAYBE YOU DIDN'T CARE IF I TALKED OR NOT?

YOU'RE THE KIND OF SICK PUP THAT LIKES KICKING AROUND A...

...A POOR--

--DEFENSELESS--

--WOMAN!

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM, SELKIRK?

CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE?

OH!

20

LEHAH.

WHERE IS LEHAH?

LEHAH?

HE'S... DEAD.

HE'S BEEN DEAD A LONG TIME...

YOU...

...LAST OF THE THREE WHO *MURDERED* AZRAEL! DESTINY HAS BROUGHT ME TO...

...THE MAN WHO KILLED MY FATHER?!

YOUR FATHER...?

BATMAN'S FATHER?

FOR THE LIFE OF MY FATHER, YOU **DIE!**

NO.

21

I CAN'T LET YOU KILL HIM.

GET AWAY.

I CAN'T. WE SETTLE THIS--

--HERE AND NOW!

ON TO BATMAN#510!

Cover art by KELLEY JONES

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MOENCH
MANLEY
RUBINSTEIN

KELLEY JONES '94

RETURN OF THE BAT

THEY FACE EACH OTHER, BOTH MASKED, THE MODEL AND ITS MIRRORED MOCKERY.

IT'S OVER. YOU'VE HAD A WILD RIDE- BUT IT ENDS HERE.

AND WHO'S GOING TO END IT-NOW THAT YOU'RE RETIRED?

CONSIDER THIS A COMEBACK.

DOUG MOENCH-MIKE MANLEY & JOE RUBINSTEIN-ADRIENNE ROY-KEN BRUZENAK-JORDAN B. GORFINKEL-DENNIS O'NEIL

writer artists colorist letterer assistant editor editor

THIS IS IT, NIGHTWING— IT'S GOING DOWN.

MAYBE NOT—MAYBE HE CAN *REASON* WITH HIM.

WHEN *I* REASONED WITH HIM, HE ALMOST *CHOKED* ME TO DEATH.

NOW *UNHAND* HIM.

YOU'VE DONE *ENOUGH* DAMAGE.

DO NOT *LISTEN* TO HIM, MY SON!

YOU MUST *AVENGE* MY *DEATH!*

LET HIM GO

NO...?

YES?

HE...HE *KILLED* MY *FATHER.*

THEN I'LL TAKE HIM-IN.

IS THAT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US..? YES...I THINK IT IS...

...YOU TAKE THEM IN...

...I TAKE THEM DOWN!

SHOKK

LIKE ABATTOIR?

ABATTOIR DESERVED TO GO DOWN--EVEN MORE THAN MOST.

GRAHAM ETCHISON DIDN'T.

WHAT ARE YOU--?

HAD ABATTOIR LIVED TO BE QUESTIONED, ETCHISON MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAVED.

I DON'T CARE WHAT-

NO, YOU DON'T CARE- BUT THE REAL BATMAN DOES-AND THE REAL BATMAN NEVER KILLS.

I DIDN'T KILL--NOT EVEN ABATTOIR! I WALKED AWAY AND--

YOU LET HIM DIE- AND AS A RESULT, GRAHAM ETCHISON DIED!

YOU'RE OUT OF CONTROL- JUST AS BAD AS WHAT YOU PROFESS TO FIGHT!

MAYBE IT'S THE *SYSTEM*- THE *BRAINWASHING* OF THE *ORDER OF SAINT DUMAS*. I DON'T *KNOW*, AND RIGHT NOW I DON'T *CARE*--BUT I *AM* BACK TO *STOP* IT.

YOU'RE *BROKEN*-- THE *PAST*!

I'M THE *FUTURE*!

YOU'RE A *MISTAKE*, THE BIGGEST OF MY *LIFE*, MADE IN A MOMENT OF *WEAKNESS*-- AND I'M HERE TO *TAKE IT ALL BACK*.

IT'S *TOO LATE*-- UNLESS YOU WANT *MORE* PUNISHMENT...IS *THAT* IT? I ALREADY SHOVED YOU ASIDE *ONCE*!

THAT WAS *THEN*.

I DON'T SHOVE *NOW*.

YOU *MEAN* IT, DON'T YOU? YOU REALLY WANT TO SEE WHO'S *BEST*...

I WANT TO *STOP* YOU-- AND I WANT TO *HELP* YOU.

DON'T LISTEN TO HIS *LIES* AND *TAUNTS*! HE'S *PATRONIZING* YOU!

YOU BEAT *BANE*, BUT THAT WAS *HIS* NEMESIS-- AND NOW *HE* IS *YOUR* BANE!

IF YOU'LL JUST--

SHRUP

PUP

PUP

NO! IT'S *MINE* NOW!

IF YOU WANT IT *BACK*, YOU'LL HAVE TO *TAKE* IT!!

REP PEP PEP PEP

SWFFFF

SHUFT

AHN-!

SHRREP

ALL VERY *INTERESTING*, GENTLEMEN--ONE MAN FIGHTING ANOTHER OVER THE RIGHT TO REPEATEDLY RISK HIS LIFE ATTIRED LIKE A *BAT*...

BUT IF IT ISN'T TOO MUCH *TROUBLE*, I WOULD APPRECIATE *ESCAPING* THIS CHARMING *PENTHOUSE DEATHTRAP.*

AND SINCE THE BATTLE OF THE BAT-MEN PROVIDES A PERFECT *DISTRACTION...*

BRRRRT

...KINDLY *KILL THE WOMAN!*

BRRRRT

YOU *GOT* IT, MR. SELKIRK.

BRRRRRRT

CHASH KUSH

ROBIN! NIGHTWING!

FIRST BLOOD, *MINE--*

--BECAUSE *MY* COSTUME HAS BEEN *IMPROVED!*

AND YOU *RELY* ON IT *FAR TOO MUCH.*

KAUMP!

WE'RE *FINE*, BATMAN. JUST WORRY ABOUT *YOURSELF!*

TSUGG

BRRRT

SH-TRAKT

STING

PHOOM

HWOKK

THRAKK

SHUMP

STAY *OUT* OF THIS!

I DON'T *NEED* YOUR HELP-AND I DON'T *WANT* IT...

WHAT I WANT AND NEED IS SELKIRK'S *NEURAL ENABLER...*

...PLUS SOME OF HIS *HIDE* ON THE *TOP!*

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM

SOUNDS LIKE CATWOMAN FOUND SELKIRK'S *OTHER* BODYGUARDS...

YEAH, BUT WHAT'S HE *GOT* IN THIS PENTHOUSE—AN *ARMY*?

A LOT MORE THAN THE *BOY SCOUTS*—AND WHETHER CATWOMAN WANTS OUR HELP OR NOT...

...NOBODY SHOOTS IN *MY* DIRECTION.

DITTO..

THIS COSTUME IS BOTH *ARMOR AND* WEAPON!

...I GUESS.

WHAT DO YOU RELY ON ?

FSHSHSH

WHATEVER HAPPENS TO BE--

KRNSCH

WAKK

--AT HAND.

KEESH

BLASH

SHUMP

SHREK

SELKIRK!!

F-TASH

THIS IS SELKIRK!

I NEED PICK UP!

AND SINCE THERE'S AN ANNOYINGLY PERSISTENT WOMAN AFTER THE *NEURAL ENABLER*, FORTHWITH HASTE IS *MANDATORY!*

TWO MORE GETTING AWAY IN THE *ELEVATOR*, NIGHTWING-- AND ITS PROBABLY *HIGH-SPEED!*

WE'LL *NEVER* CATCH THEM WITH THE *STAIRS!*

THEN *WE'LL* HAVE TO TAKE OUT THE ELEVATOR...

BHOOM

...OR AT LEAST THE ELEVATOR *SHAFT!*

LONG CABLE-SLIDE- HOPE YOUR GLOVES ARE THICK.

FORGET THE GLOVES, ROBIN...

IT'S BRUCE I'M WORRIED ABOUT.

NOT ME, NIGHTWING...

"...THE MAN'S BEEN IN HEAVY TRAINING."

THOSE SPRINKLERS SET OFF A SILENT FIRE ALARM.

HWOK

THE POLICE WILL BE HERE SOON...

...GIVE IT UP!

SWAKK

YOU WANT ME TO QUIT...LIKE YOU DID?

NEVER.

LET ME GET THIS *STRAIGHT*, COMMISSIONER GORDON.

YOU WANT ME TO CONDONE YOUR POLICE FORCE GOING AFTER THE *BATMAN*--WHEN I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU--

--TO MODEL YOUR METHODS ON *HIS*?

HE'S *OUT OF CONTROL*, MR. MAYOR...

...MAKING A *TRAVESTY* OF THE *LAW*.

NONSENSE-- CRIME IS DOWN *FORTY-TWO PERCENT* SINCE HE GOT *TOUGH*.

THE BATMAN IS *EXACTLY* WHAT GOTHAM *NEEDS*.

AND WITH YOUR HISTORY OF SUPPORTING HIM-EVEN *DEFENDING* HIM--I SHOULD THINK YOU WOULD *AGREE*.

BUT HE'S NOT THE REAL--

BRIIIINGG

YES, KROL SPEAKING... WHO? HOLD ON, HE'S RIGHT *HERE*.

IT'S FOR YOU, GORDON.

WHAT? *WHERE*?

ALL RIGHT, I'LL BE RIGHT *THERE*.

NOT THE REAL *WHAT*?

12

YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A *PRETENDER* NOW--ALREADY *FINISHED.*

BUT EVEN IF YOU WERE STILL IN YOUR *PRIME*--STILL A *REAL THREAT...*

CHUT

..YOU *CAN'T HURT ME.*

SAHFT

AHRR!

AND YOU'RE *NOT* IN YOUR PRIME!

BWUFT

YOU'RE *NO THREAT AT ALL!*

IT'S *SLOWING DOWN-REACHING BOTTOM...*

YEAH-- WE CAN *DROP* THE REST OF THE WAY.

KUTUMPT

HUH-?

THERE'S SOMEONE *UP* THERE!

BAMBAMBAM BAMBAMBAM

BLAST 'EM!

POK POK POK POK POK POK POK

ding

KRUTCH

OHMYEEE--

EEEEEEEEE

EVERYBODY DOWN!

AND STAY DOWN!

DESCENDING NOW, MR SELKIRK...

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP

HURRY IT UP, YOU IDIOTS!

CATWOMAN'S RIGHT BEHIND ME!

KYNEX

SELKIRRRK!

CERTAINLY TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH!

NOW LET'S GO! LIFT OFF!

...BUT SWING AROUND TO THE *TERRACE* SIDE FOR A BIT OF *UNFINISHED BUSINESS*.

WHUP WHUP WHUP

16

SHWWWP

WHAT KIND OF BUSINESS?

WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP

FWP WP WP

WHAT'S GOING ON, MR. SELKIRK?

JUST GET THAT BIG GUN READY-AND WATCH.

WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP

ROKT

SHAKK

YOU HEAR THAT? SOUNDS LIKE A CHOPPER... ALMOST DIRECTLY ABOVE.

YEAH, BUT NOT A POLICE HELICOPTER.

SOUNDS BIGGER...

"...ALMOST LIKE A MILITARY GUNSHIP."

WHUP WHUP WHUP

GUN'S ALL SET, MR. SELKIRK.

THEN KINDLY CLEAR ASIDE, SON...

...BECAUSE IT'S TIME TO KILL TWO BATS WITH ONE BIG GUN.

BRAKAKAKAKAK

BZAI

SPANG

CHEEYEW

VIP

SPAK

SPANG

POK

HEADS UP AND HOLD THE FIREMEN BACK!

WE GOT A LOT MORE THAN A CARELESS-SMOKER FIRE UP THERE...

AND WHAT DO WE HAVE, SERGEANT BULLOCK?

BEATS ME, KOCHMAN, BUT IF I HAD TO GUESS...

"...I'D SAY A REPLAY OF DESERT STORM."

GIVE IT UP, JEAN PAUL! I CAN'T SHIELD MYSELF WITH YOUR ARMOR FOREVER....

THEN DIE.

BRAKAKAKAK

NOT WHEN YOUR GRAPNEL...

...CAN SAVE US BOTH...!

WHAT ARE THEY WEARING--?!

BRAKAKAKAKA

THE NEURAL ENABLER-- NOW!

CHC JF

WHAT THE-?! SHE'S HERE?!

NO-!

YOU SPOILED--

CHUF

CHRRAAKT

"-THE AIM!"

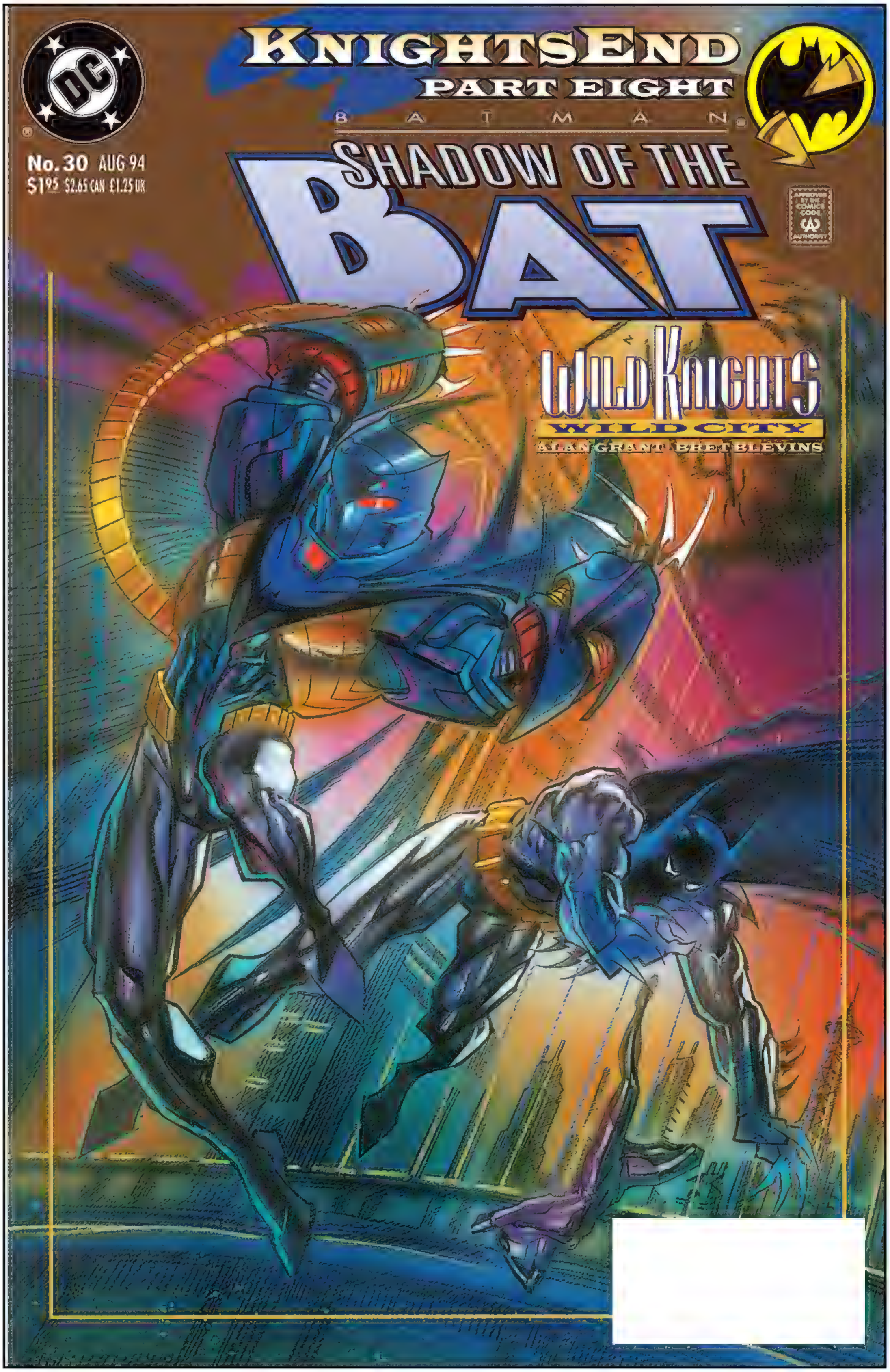
THE BATMAN... BOTH OF THEM!

AND IT'LL BE A MIRACLE...

...IF EVEN ONE SURVIVES."

continued in SHADOW OF THE BAT #30

Cover art by **BRIAN STELFREEZE**



THE CHOPPER LURCHES ACROSS THE NIGHT SKY LIKE SOME HUGE, WOUNDED BIRD AS THE PILOT STRIVES DESPERATELY FOR CONTROL.

CATWOMAN CLINGS TO THE SIDE, LAUGHING IN THE FACE OF THE WIND, UNDAUNTED BY THE CAREENING CRAFT. INSIDE IS HER PREY, THE GUNRUNNER ***SELKIRK*** AND THE ***NEURAL ENABLER*** SHE NEEDS TO SAVE A LIFE.

AND TRAILING FROM THE MONOFILAMENT WIRE JAMMING THE CHOPPER'S REAR ROTOR ARE TWO MEN WHO SHOULD HAVE BEEN ***ALLIES,*** NATURAL ***PARTNERS*** IN THE ***WAR ON CRIME.***

INSTEAD, THEY'RE ***ENEMIES***...; AND ONE INTENDS TO ***KILL*** THE OTHER!

JEAN PAUL VALLEY'S BATMAN IS A THING OF METAL AND FIRE, ALL RAZOR EDGES AND BULLETPROOF TERROR, A GUISE FOR ***PUNISHMENT*** AND ***RETRIBUTION***. FOR THIS BATMAN THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS, AND ALREADY TWO MEN HAVE ***DIED*** BECAUSE OF HIM.

BRUCE WAYNE'S BATMAN STANDS FOR ***JUSTICE***. HE HAS SWORN THAT NO MORE LIFE WILL BE TAKEN--

--AND STAKED HIS ***OWN*** LIFE ON THE RESULT.

THOSE FINS CAN SLICE THROUGH ME LIKE SO MUCH MEAT!

YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE TO **WITHDRAW**, IMPOSTOR! NOW YOU MUST **DIE** TO LEARN THE TRUTH--

--THERE IS ONLY **ONE** BATMAN!

YOU CANNOT AVOID ME FOR LONG! YOU'RE **FINISHED**, WAYNE!

THAT'S IT, BIG-MOUTH! KEEP LOOKING THIS WAY!

IF HE HAS ANY SENSE HE'LL LET GO NOW...!

I GUESS THAT MAKES TWO OF US!

CHEEZ, WHAT A *MESS!* HOW'S TH' BOSS GONNA GET OUTA *THAT?*

NO POINT *YOU* WORRYING ABOUT IT, GUYS--

--YOU HAVE YOUR *OWN* PROBLEMS!

BLAM!

PUNCH

THE MOOK HAD A POINT, *NIGHTWING*--

--HOW THE HECK *IS* THE BOSS GOING TO GET OUT OF THAT?

IT'S GOING TO CRASH! COME ON!

5

¡HHNN

TIME I WAS MAKING CAT TRACKS--!

I CAN'T! NOTHIN'S RESPONDIN'! THE BRIDGE--!

THE RIVER! PUT US DOWN IN THE **WATER,** MAN!

LIKE A BALLET DANCER, HIS HEAD TURNS WITH EVERY SPIN, AVOIDING NAUSEA AND GIDDINESS. STAYING ALERT ENOUGH TO TAKE IN EVERY DETAIL OF WHAT'S HAPPENING.

INSTANTLY HIS DECISION IS MADE, AND HIS BODY MOVES TO CARRY IT OUT--

--STRONG, AGILE, CONFIDENT--

ONLY DAYS AGO HE MIGHT HAVE FROZEN, BUT *LADY SHIVA'S* TRAINING HAS DONE ITS JOB. HE IS ONCE MORE THE MAN HE USED TO BE--

--MASTER OF THE NIGHT.

LOOK AT THAT! IT'S CRASHED RIGHT ON TOP OF THE BRIDGE!

DAVE-- BRAKE! BRAKE!

KRANG!

KUNCH

KRUMP

STAY IN YOUR CARS!

LOOK OUT--!

KRANG!

KRASH!

HE LASHES HIS LINE TO THE CABLE, GRIMLY AWARE THAT EVERY SECOND COUNTS.

YOUR CONCERN FOR OTHERS WAS ALWAYS YOUR *WEAKNESS*--

BOOT!

--AND NOW IT IS YOUR *DOWNFALL!*

WEAKNESS IS FOR *LOSERS!* THERE IS NO PLACE FOR IT IN THE WORLD OF THE BATMAN! ONLY THE *STRONG* CAN *SURVIVE!*

LOSERS DIE!

WHAT--?

GET THIS, COMISSIONER GORDON!

REPORTED AUTOMATIC GUN-FIRE ON THE ROOF OF RIVERSIDE APARTMENTS--

--TWO MORE CALLS CLAIM SHOOTING IN THE LOBBY--

--THREE SAY THE PENTHOUSE IS ON FIRE--

--AND SEVERAL REPORT THERE'S A COMBAT CHOPPER SPRAY-ING THE AREA WITH HEAVY CALIBER BULLETS!

DON'T YOU JUST LOVE THIS CITY, OR WHAT...?

MY LEG-- I THINK IT'S BROKE!

THANK YOUR STARS YOU'RE ALIVE, BUDDY!

WHAT'S THAT SMELL...?

FUEL!

AN' THE ELECTRICS ARE SPARKIN'--!

I'M TAKIN' MY CHANCES ON THE BRIDGE!

AAAH!

SIT DOWN BEFORE YOU TIP US OVER!

BUT WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?

I'M THINKING! I'M THINKING!

FORTUNATE THAT HE'D SEEN THE ***MAINTENANCE WALK*** BEFORE THE CHOPPER CRASHED. IT'S A LONG WAY DOWN.

YOU'VE DONE WELL, WAYNE--COMING BACK LIKE THIS AFTER WHAT ***BANE*** DID TO YOU. BUT JUST AS ***BANE*** BROKE ***YOU***, I BROKE ***BANE***--

--AS I'LL BREAK ***ANY*** MAN WHO ***DARES*** INTERFERE WITH MY ***SACRED MISSION!***

THE PATHS OF ***THE BAT*** AND THE ***PUNISHING ANGEL*** HAVE MET, AND JOINED, AND ARE ***ONE!***

I AM THE PROTECTOR OF GOTHAM! I AM THE SCOURGE OF EVIL! I AM THE ONE ***TRUE*** BATMAN--

--SLAYER OF ***FALSE*** DEMONS!

BRUCE WAYNE HEARS ***MADNESS*** IN THE WORDS. PAUL FIGHTS IN THE GRIP OF FORCES HE NEITHER UNDERSTANDS NOR CONTROLS--

--ALL THE MORE IMPERATIVE THAT HE'S STOPPED!

PAUL SCORNED HIS CHANCES TO GIVE UP. HE WON'T RECONSIDER NOW.

IT GOES ON TILL THERE'S AN ENDING. TILL ***ONE*** OF THEM IS ***BEAT***--

--TILL BRUCE WAYNE FINDS AN ***ANSWER*** TO ***THE SYSTEM***.

SO MANY TRICKS IN HIS *UTILITY BELT*-- NO DESIRE TO USE THEM.

SAY IT, WAYNE! ONE *TRUE* BATMAN!

PROBABLY USELESS, ANYWAY. PAUL HAS AN ANSWER TO EVERYTHING BUILT INTO THAT SUIT OF ARMOR.

ONE TRUE BATMAN!

ONE TRUE BATMAN!

COME ON, FOLKS! CLEAR THE BRIDGE!

NO SAYING WHAT'LL COME DOWN NEXT!

TO THE RIGHTEOUS, THE VICTORY!

LET ANGEL'S FLAME SEND YOU BACK TO YOUR FIERY PITS OF HELL!

FUEL FROM THE CHOPPER! I HAVE TO STOP HIM OR WE'RE ALL TOAST!

OUFF!

UNGH!

BURN, IMPOSTOR!

AAAAAHHH!

EXPERIENCE TELLS ME IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN THAT TO STOP HIM! BUT I CAN FIND HIM LATER.

RIGHT NOW, I HAVE TO GET TO *SELKIRK* AND HIS CREW BEFORE THE CHOPPER GOES UP!

WOW!

SPOOSH

THAT ARMOR'LL DRAG HIM DOWN! HE'LL *DROWN!*

GONE!

YOURS, I BELIEVE.

THANKS.

AREN'T YOU HEADING THE WRONG WAY?

THERE ARE MEN STILL INSIDE!

DOESN'T MATTER. I CAN'T LET THEM DIE.

SELKIRK AND HIS MOOKS? *MEN?*

IF THE *TINGLE* SHE FELT THE FIRST TIME SHE'D SEEN HIM LEFT HER IN ANY DOUBT, IT FADES NOW. THE MAN IN THE METAL COSTUME WOULD NEVER RISK HIS LIFE FOR SCUM--

--SHE KNOWS THE *REAL* BATMAN IS BACK.

OH NO-- BATMAN AND CATWOMAN!

DAMN!

RESCUE WORK'S NOT IN *YOUR* LINE. WHAT'S YOUR ANGLE?

SELKIRK HAS SOMETHING I NEED. ONCE I HAVE IT, I DON'T CARE *WHAT* HAPPENS TO HIM!

SHE'S SECURED--YOU CAN GET OUT NOW! TAKE IT STEADY, BUT MOVE AS FAST AS YOU CAN!

AND LEAVE YOUR *GUNS* BEHIND!

NICE TRY, SELKIRK-- BUT NO COCONUT. THE *ENABLER* --GIVE!

OF COURSE--

--DIVE FOR IT, WHY DON'T YOU?

OH, I FORGOT. CATS *HATE* WATER! HA HA!

AND CREEPS...

...WE JUST *LOATHE* CREEPS!

LET HIM FALL, FOR ALL THE USE HE IS NOW!

YOU MIGHT AS WELL SEE THINGS THROUGH!

TAKE HIM! I'LL HELP THE OTHERS.

IT'S MY LEG. I CAN'T PUT ANY WEIGHT ON IT!

GET DOWN FLAT ON THE WALKWAY! *MOVE!*

TAKE COVER! *IT'S GOING TO BLOW!*

HE ARCS BACK AN INSTANT BEFORE THE SAVAGE HEAT BLOSSOMS, DROPPING AWAY FROM THE FORCE OF THE BLAST AND THE EAR-SPLITTING ROAR.

THE TERRIFIED THUG SCREAMS AS DEATH OPENS HER ARMS WIDE...

...BUT THE MAN IN THE COSTUME IS CALM, UNAFRAID, WITH TOTAL CONFIDENCE IN HIS BODY AND HIS SENSES.

NO WAY PAUL COULD HAVE SWUM IN THAT COSTUME!

BRUCE KNOWS THE CURRENTS OF THIS RIVER, KNOWS THAT THEY WASH DOWN EVER-FASTER TILL THEY HIT THE *GOTHAM NARROWS*--

THWUMP

THERE'S ONE PLACE WHERE THE RIVER SWEEPS AND BENDS, AND THE CURRENT TOSSES ITS BOUNTY UP ON A SMALL PEBBLE BEACH.

THOK

THAT'S WHERE HE'LL FIND HIM!

NOW THAT WAS SOMETHING!

WHERE'S HE GOING?

PAUL'S CHANGED THE ACCESS CODES, OF COURSE. BUT BRUCE *DESIGNED* THESE LOCKS; HE'S WELL AWARE OF THEIR ADVANTAGES--

ACCESS DENIED

--AND THEIR LIMITATIONS.

ENTER

HE SEES **ROBIN** RUNNING TOWARDS HIM BUT THE BOY'S WORDS ARE LOST AS THE BATMOBILE'S TWIN-TURBO V-12 ROARS INTO LIFE.

NO--*DON'T!* PAUL'S ***MODIFIED*** THE WHOLE THING! I'M SURE HE--

--BOOBY-TRAPPED IT!

BAM

HE WAS WARNED!

HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE CROSSED THE *PUNISHING ANGEL!* NOW HE HAS PROVED, WITH HIS LIFE--

--THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE BATMAN!

CONTINUED IN *DETECTIVE COMICS #677!*

Cover art by KELLEY JONES and JOHN BEATTY

KNIGHTSEND™

PART NINE

DETECTIVE COMICS® FEATURING BATMAN

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NOLAN
HANNA

FLESH and STEEL

CHUCK DIXON. writer
GRAHAM NOLAN. penciller
SCOTT HANNA. inker
ADRIENNE ROY. colorist
JOHN COSTANZA. letterer
DARREN VINCENZO. assistant editor
SCOTT PETERSON. editor
BATMAN created by BOB KANE

YOU KILLED HIM!

YOU KILLED THE BATMAN!

HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE CROSSED THE PUNISHING ANGEL! NOW HE HAS PROVED WITH HIS LIFE--

THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE BATMAN!

NEVER!
YOU COULD NEVER BE THE BATMAN!
UNNH!
BRUCE... DEAD?
THIS ISN'T THE WAY IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE. AFTER ALL THIS...
2
JEAN PAUL WILL BE BATMAN NOW. DID ANY OF IT MATTER?
COULD HE BE THE GUARDIAN GOTHAM DESERVES?
NO WAY.
MY BABY!
SOMEONE HELP ME!
3

KILLER!

YOU'RE NOTHING COMPARED TO HIM!

NOTHING!

I AM THE VICTOR. I AM THE SURVIVOR,

AND THAT COUNTS FOR... EVERYTHING.

THE CITY HAS CHANGED. THE WORLD HAS CHANGED.

THE TIME FOR MASQUERADES AND ADVENTURES IS PASSED. NO MORE COSTUMES NOW...

ONLY ARMOR!

4

I'LL SAVE HER! GET CLEAR OF THIS FIRE!

BUT-- BUT--

NOW!

OKAY... OKAY.. I'LL GET YOU OUT OF HERE.

THIS IS HARDER THAN I THOUGHT. I'VE NEVER *WORKED* ONE OF THESE.

MOMMY CAN ALWAYS BUY ANOTHER SEAT BELT.

CAPE'S MADE OF NOMEX. BUT THAT'S NOT GOING TO HELP US ONCE THE FIRE HITS A--

GAS TANK!

BOOM

CAROL ANN!

WHOA.

WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT?

SOME -- SOMEONE BLEW UP THE BATMOBILE -- IT'S --

YOU'D BETTER CLEAR THIS BRIDGE. WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A LOT OF *SECONDARY* EXPLOSIONS.

NIGHTWING!

UH?

THE HEIR TO THE THRONE AND THE SLIGHTED PRINCE!

WE FALL *TOGETHER.*

NOT *EXACTLY*, HAMMERHEAD!

PUF!

YOU'VE GOT THE *ADVANTAGE*, PAL.

THE ARMOR. THE WEIGHT. THE WEAPONS.

BUT I'VE GOT THE *MOVES!*

UNNNNH!

CAN YOU *TAKE* ANOTHER HIT LIKE THAT?

I DON'T *THINK* SO!

MAYBE NOT. BUT CAN *YOU* TAKE...

... THE DROP TO THE RIVER?

NIGHTWING!

ROBIN...

...BATMAN?

COME WITH ME.

BUT NIGHTWING AND PAUL...

NIGHTWING CAN HOLD HIS OWN. HE'LL KNOW WHEN TO BREAK IT OFF.

THE EXPLOSION -- HOW DID YOU--?

HAD JUST ENOUGH TIME TO GET OUT. I REALIZED WHEN I GOT INSIDE THAT PAUL WOULD HAVE RIGGED THE CAR.

HOW--?

BECAUSE I WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME THING.

8

"BUT NOT SO LETHAL A TRAP."

SO HEAVY...

CAN'T GET FREE...

HE'S GOT HIS OWN OXYGEN SUPPLY...

...CAN OUTLAST ME...

...HAVE TO FREE MYSELF...

NOW!

ADDERLY, WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON HERE?

I WAS LATE ON THE SCENE, SGT. BULLOCK. BUT WE GOT WITNESSES SAW EVERYTHING BUT *FLYING SAUCERS* HERE.

WE *SAW* THE CHOPPER CRASH.

CE LINE DO NOT C

THAT WAS JUST THE *BEGINNING.*

COUPLE PEOPLE SAY THEY SAW *TWO* BATMANS. I MEAN, BAT*MEN*, RIGHT? THEN SOME CAR EXPLODED BIGTIME AND IT *REALLY* HIT THE FAN.

GC

PD

SO WHAT DO *YOU* GUYS KNOW?

NOT A DAMN THING. JUST KEEP THE *GAWKERS* OFF THE BRIDGE, OKAY?

SO WHAT IS GOING ON, HARV?

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

FROM WHERE I STAND, MONTOYA?

IT LOOKS LIKE THE COSTUMED GEEKS ARE FIGHTING TO SEE WHO GETS TO BE GOTHAM'S NUMBER ONE MASKED MAN.

10

CAN'T LOSE SIGHT OF HIM...

SWIMS LIKE A SHARK...

MAN!

NEVER THOUGHT I'D REACH THE SURFACE!

HOW'S HE MOVE SO FAST IN THAT STEEL SUIT?

ALMOST LIKE HE'S GOT AN *OUTBOARD* IN HIS UTILITY BELT.

GREAT. A *PARTY* BOAT.

NOTHING LIKE HAVING A TON OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS AROUND.

YOU WANT TO *PROVE* YOURSELF, FLEDGLING.

WHUH?

YOU WANT TO TAKE *ME* DOWN AND BE THE BIG MAN.

DEFEAT ME AND MAKE YOURSELF THE *EQUAL* OF YOUR MENTOR.

THAT *WOULD* HAVE IMPRESSED HIM, WOULDN'T IT?

DEFEATING THE MAN WHO *BESTED* BATMAN.

SUCH A *CHILD!*

THAT *TEARS* IT!

12

UK!

BEHIND ALL THAT STEEL AND ALL THOSE DAMN GADGETS...

...YOU'RE JUST A COMMON THUG!

YOU WANT TO BE BATMAN, HUH?

YEAH, RIGHT.

YOU'D HAVE TO STAND ON TOP OF GOTHAM TOWER JUST TO REACH HIS BOOTS!

YOU DIDN'T BEST HIM! YOU MURDERED HIM!

NOW I'M GOING TO PEEL THAT TINSUIT OFF YOU AND AIR YOU OUT!

13

ENOUGH!

TOUCHED A NERVE THERE.

GET HIM *MAD* ENOUGH AND HE'S BOUND TO SCREW UP.

I JUST HOPE I'M *ALIVE* TO SEE IT!

14

LOOK AT THAT SHARK'S GRIN.

DON'T TELL ME HE *FINALLY* GOT A GOOD HAND.

READ 'EM AND *WEEP*, SUCKERS. THIS ONE'S *ALL* MINE.

NO!

THE BIGGEST POT OF *MY LIFE!* THE BEST HAND I EVER *HELD!*

THIS WOULD NEVER HAPPEN IN *ST. LOUIS!*

15

I'LL BREAK YOU! I'LL KILL YOU!

THEN I'LL KILL THAT BRAT ROBIN!

THEN ALL OF THE PRETENDERS WILL BE DEAD!

ONLY ONE BATMAN WILL RULE THE NIGHT!

WELL, DICK, YOU GOT HIM TICKED OFF.

NOW WHAT?

FINISH HIM.

FOR GOTHAM.

FOR BRUCE.

THE ONLY PRETENDER HERE IS *YOU*, HAMMER-HEAD!

YOU *KILLED* THE ONLY BATMAN THERE'LL EVER BE!

HE WAS ONLY THE *HERALD* FOR THE TRUE BATMAN!

A PALE *SHADOW* OF GOTHAM'S ONLY KNIGHT!

THE LEGACY IS *MINE!* THE MANTLE OF THE BAT WAS FORGED FOR *MY* SHOULDERS!

SO YOU CAN TAKE A *HIT*, HAMMERHEAD. WELL, I'M NOT...

HUH?

LADY, GET *OUT* OF HERE!

NO *WAY*, SPORT! I BEEN PLAYIN' THIS BANDIT ALL NIGHT AND HE'S GETTIN' READY TO PAY *BIG!*

JEEZE...

17

FLEDGLING!

IT IS ALMOST OVER.

ALL THAT IS LEFT IS THE FINAL BLOW. THEN THE BOY DIES. THEN GOTHAM IS *MINE*.

MAKE LIKE A *STATUE*, CREEP.

DAVE... AIN'T THAT THE *BATMAN*?

LIKE I CARE? THE GUY'S GONE *PSYCHO*!

ANOTHER RESPITE, NIGHTWING!

YOUR LAST, FLEDGLING!

UHH!

JULI

19

WHAT'S HE SAYIN', DAVE?

SO SORRY... SO SORRY...

SOUNDS LIKE HE'S APOLOGIZING.

COULDN'T STOP HIM... COULDN'T STOP HIM, BRUH--

WE'RE GONNA GET YOU HELP, PAL. WHO WAS THAT GUY?

WAS IT THE BATMAN?

NEVER...

...ONLY ONE... ONLY ONE BATMAN...

...HE'LL NEVER BE BATMAN... NEVER...

I'VE DONE IT, HOLY DUMAS... SACRED WARRIOR...

I HAVE AVENGED. I HAVE REDEEMED. I HAVE TAKEN THE DARK CITY.

ITS STREETS AND SECRETS AND ITS SOUL ARE MINE.

THE WAR IS WON. ONLY A FEW SORTIES TO BE MADE TO STRENGTHEN MY HOLD ON GOTHAM.

MY FATHER'S KILLER BARKS IN HELL. BRUCE WAYNE IS A MEMORY.

THE CRUSADE IS OVER. NO ONE STANDS BEFORE ME.

THE CITY IS CLOAKED IN THE MANTLE OF THE BAT. ITS CITIZENS SLEEP BENEATH MY PROTECTION.

BENEATH THE BLADE OF AZRAEL.

HUH?

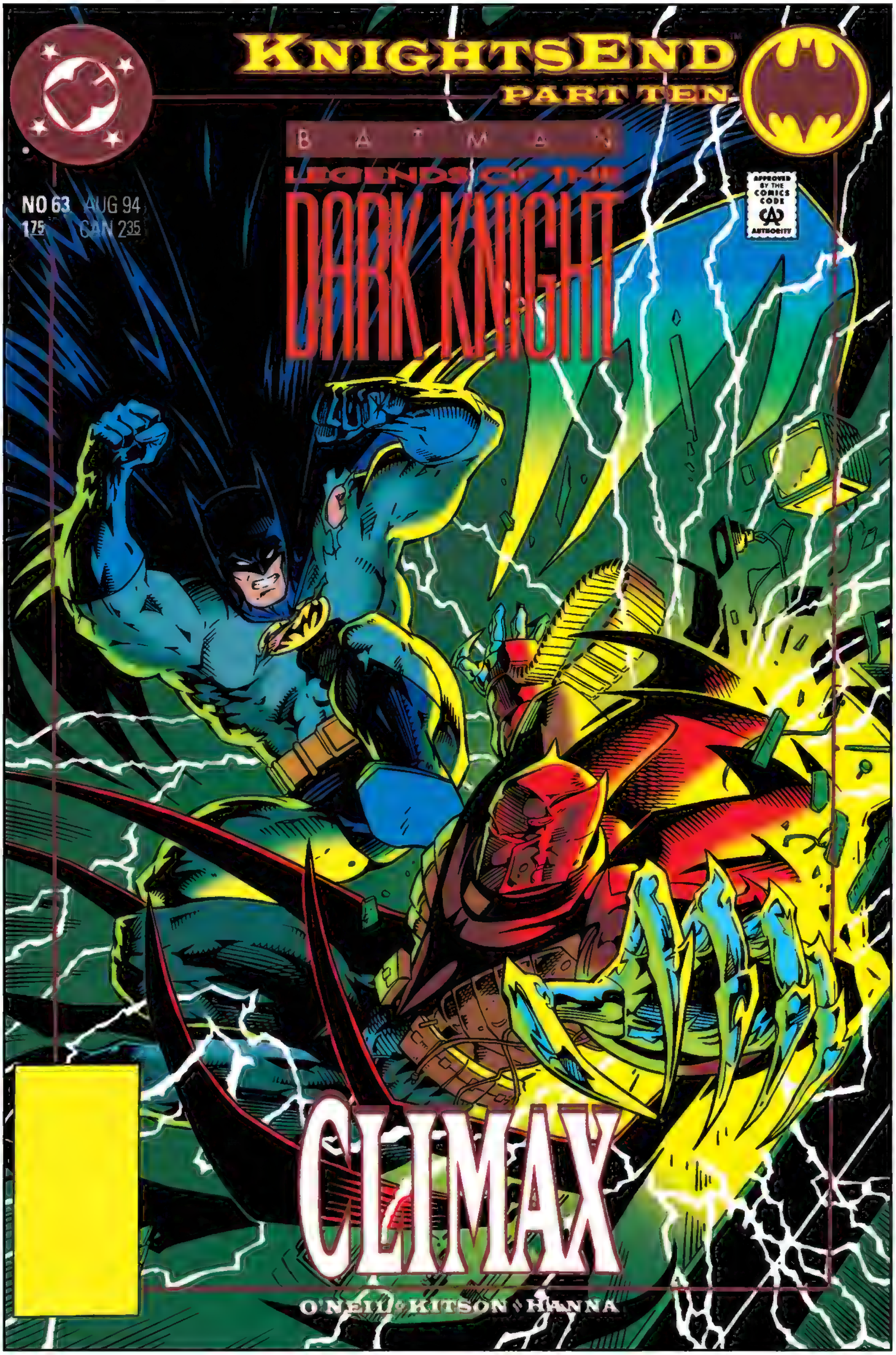
SOMEONE ABOVE. THE BOY...

VERY FOOLISH OF YOU TO COME HERE, ROBIN...

NOT ROBIN, JEAN PAUL...

IT'S ME.
YOU'VE GOT A LOT TO ANSWER FOR.

Cover art by **BARRY KITSON** and **SCOTT HANNA**



MOMENTS AGO, BRUCE WAYNE STEPPED ACROSS THE THRESHOLD OF THE HOUSE HIS FAMILY HAS OWNED FOR OVER A CENTURY--KNOWING HIS PRESENCE WOULD ACTIVATE HIDDEN ALARMS, KNOWING THAT THE MAN WHO LIVES IN THE CAVE BELOW WOULD APPEAR.

NO!

YOU ARE NOT THE BATMAN!

I AM THE BATMAN!

NOW-- GET OUT!

THE VOICE IS FULL OF RAGE--RAGE AND SOMETHING ELSE, SOMETHING DARKER AND UGLIER.

CLIMAX

writer
DENNY O'NEIL

penciller
BARRY KITSON

inker
SCOTT HANNA

letterer
WILLIE SCHUBERT

colorist
DIGITAL CHAMELEON

assistant editor
CHUCK KIM

associate editor
JIM SPIVEY

editor
ARCHIE GOODWIN

BATMAN created by BOB KANE

I'M NOT HERE TO FIGHT WITH YOU, JEAN PAUL--

I AM NOT JEAN PAUL. HE IS GONE-- FOREVER. I AM THE BATMAN.

OKAY-- BATMAN. LET'S TALK.

WE HAVE NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT.

DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU AGAIN? *GET OUT!*

LOOK...I *DO* OWN THIS HOUSE. IT'S MINE--

BECAUSE SOMEONE *GAVE* IT TO YOU.

HE GAVE IT TO YOU--YOUR *FATHER.*

I'LL BET YOUR DADDY GAVE YOU *LOTS* OF THINGS, DIDN'T HE?

YOU DON'T DESERVE TO OWN WAYNE MANOR--

--ANY MORE THAN YOU DESERVE TO BE THE BATMAN.

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE THAT. BATMAN IS MY CREATION--

IS HE? SOMEHOW I DOUBT IT. I DON'T THINK A PRIVILEGED, PAMPERED WEAKLING LIKE BRUCE WAYNE--

--COULD CREATE SOME-THING LIKE ME--

LIKE... YOU?

--BUT LET'S SAY YOU AREN'T LYING. LET'S SAY YOU *DID* CREATE BATMAN. YOU WERE TOO WEAK TO CONTINUE BEING HIM--TOO WEAK AND TOO COWARDLY.

YOU COULDN'T DEFEAT BANE. ONLY I COULD DO THAT. HE BROKE YOU LIKE A TWIG AND WHAT DID YOU DO?

YOU *RAN!*

RAN AND LEFT *ME* TO DO THE DIRTY WORK.

JACK DRAKE AND DOCTOR KINSOLVING WERE KIDNAPPED...I HAD TO FIND THEM...

SO YOU SAY. SO YOU'D HAVE US BELIEVE.

I WILL TELL YOU ONE FINAL TIME-- *GET OUT!*

DO WHAT YOU DO BEST-- SLINK AWAY TO YOUR CARS AND YOUR WOMEN AND YOUR PARTIES AND TAKE--

--YOUR PRECIOUS DADDY--

--WITH YOU.

UNTIL THIS MOMENT, I WASN'T SURE. DESPITE EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED EARLIER--THE FIRES, THE EXPLOSIONS, THE VIOLENCE--DESPITE ALL THAT, I WASN'T SURE YOU'D LOST CONTROL...THAT YOU'D BECOME A VINDICTIVE, SPITEFUL BRUTE.

I DIDN'T WANT TO BELIEVE ALL I HEARD. I DIDN'T WANT TO BELIEVE WHAT I WAS *SEEING*.

I DIDN'T WANT TO BELIEVE YOU LET A MAN DIE.

I DIDN'T WANT TO BELIEVE ANY OF IT. NOW, I MUST.

THE RESPONSIBILITY IS MINE. I HELPED MAKE YOU WHAT YOU ARE.

WE'VE GOT A LOT TO DO TOGETHER, YOU AND I. WE BEGIN HERE AND NOW.

TAKE OFF THE COSTUME.

NEVER.

SSSK

TSSSSSK

TSSSSSK

TSSSSSK

TSSSSK

TSSSSSK

tzing tzing

Tak

Tak

He rolls, already gathering his energies, preparing for combat. But when he looks up, he is alone. Jean Paul has fled down into the cold and darkness of the cave.

There was rage in Jean Paul's voice, and something else. Now he knows what it was.

Fear.

Jean Paul was afraid. Of what?

The answer to that might prevent the violence Bruce desperately wants to avoid. But to find it, he must confront Jean Paul.

Jean Paul has altered the locking mechanism in the clock, but Bruce built the device. It will take him only moments to--

--open it.

A hiss and a hail of lethal darts.

Which do not surprise him. He didn't expect entering the cave to be easy.

He allows himself to pause, to consider:

There are probably--

--other booby traps on the stairs behind the clock--

--and at the car exit.

BUT THERE'S ANOTHER WAY INTO THE CAVE, A WAY JEAN PAUL CANNOT POSSIBLY KNOW ABOUT--

--A HOLE A SIX-YEAR-OLD BRUCE DROPPED INTO SO LONG AGO--

--AND HUDDLED, SHIVERING AND TERRIFIED UNTIL HE HEARD THE SCRAPE OF HIS FATHER'S FEET ON THE STONE FLOOR.

HE NEVER MARKED THE SPOT, BUT HE'S NEVER FORGOTTEN EXACTLY WHERE IT IS, EITHER.

IT TAKES HIM TEN MINUTES TO DIG THROUGH THE SOD AND--

--REMOVE THE WOODEN BAFFLE HIS FATHER WEDGED INTO PLACE.

THE CAVE IS COLD AFTER THE BALMY NIGHT AIR. HE HEARS THE DISTANT DRIP OF WATER, THE FLAP OF BATS' WINGS.

ANOTHER MINUTE TO REPLACE THE BAFFLE.

MAYBE LATER HE'LL FIGURE OUT WHY HE BOTHERS.

HE SLIDES HIS NIGHT LENSES INTO PLACE OVER THE EYEHOLES IN HIS MASK. THEY'LL AMPLIFY WHATEVER LIGHT IS AVAILABLE HERE, IN ALMOST TOTAL BLACKNESS.

MAYBE THEY'LL HELP. MAYBE NOT. JEAN PAUL ALMOST CERTAINLY HAS THEM, TOO.

HE REMEMBERS THIS CHAMBER AS HUGE. THAT'S HOW IT SEEMED TO A SMALL, TERRIFIED BOY.

TO AN ADULT, IT'S TIGHT, CRAMPED, OPPRESSIVE. FOR A WHILE, HE IS BARELY ABLE TO INCH FORWARD.

SUDDENLY, THE CAVERN WIDENS AND HE IS LOOKING AT THE VAST CHAMBER HE HAS FILLED WITH COMPUTERS, REFERENCE BOOKS, LABORATORY AND GYMNASTIC EQUIPMENT--ALL THE TOOLS OF THE BATMAN'S TRADE.

A FEW PERSONAL ITEMS, TOO-- TROPHIES, MEMORABILIA. HE IS, AFTER ALL, HUMAN.

HE SCANS THE AREA, LOOKING FOR JEAN PAUL--

--AND FINALLY SEES HIM, SITTING MOTIONLESS, STARING. AT WHAT?

HE SEEMS OUT OF PLACE SURROUNDED BY THE ELECTRONICS--AS ANCIENT AND PRIMITIVE AS THE CAVE THAT CONTAINS HIM.

JEAN PAUL VALLEY--

"LISTEN TO ME"

THE WORDS ECHO THROUGH THE CHAMBER, AS THOUGH THE STONE ITSELF WERE SPEAKING.

WHO IS IT? IS THAT YOU, OH MOST VENERABLE St. DUMAS?

OR IS IT MY *FATHER* WHO'S COME TO ME AGAIN?

RAGE AND FEAR IN THE VOICE, AND SOMETHING EVEN MORE...

ST. DUMAS IS DEAD. YOUR FATHER--

--IS DEAD. IT IS TIME TO FREE YOURSELF FROM THEM... AND OF THE BATMAN.

THERE IS NO BATMAN... BATMAN IS A FICTION...

DID HE SAY THAT? CAN IT POSSIBLY BE TRUE?

FOR YEARS, HE BELIEVED THAT BATMAN WAS THE TRUTH, BRUCE WAYNE THE FICTION.

NO DUMAS, NO FATHER, NO BATMAN... ONLY YOU, JEAN PAUL VALLEY... THE OTHERS AREN'T REAL... YOU ARE...

STOP HIDING BEHIND SOMETHING THAT DOES NOT EXIST. LET YOURSELF BE YOURSELF...TAKE OFF THE COSTUME...

J

TAKE OFF THE COSTUME.

IT'S YOU, ISN'T IT? BRUCE WAYNE.

ALL RIGHT. I'M TIRED OF FIGHTING, TIRED OF RUNNING FROM YOU.

COME ON OUT AND LET'S DISCUSS A TRUCE.

WE HAVE NO NEED FOR A TRUCE. WE'RE NOT ENEMIES. BUT AS I SAID, WE HAVE A LOT TO DO TOGETHER.

NOT A LOT, REALLY. JUST ONE TASK--AND IT'S *MINE*, NOT *OURS*.

UPSTAIRS, IN THE HOUSE, I TRIED TO KILL YOU AND THEN I CHANGED MY MIND. INSTEAD OF FINISHING WHAT I'D STARTED, I CAME DOWN HERE TO THINK.

THAT WAS A MISTAKE. THINKING IS FOOLISH AND WEAK. *ACTION* IS WHAT COUNTS--

--THIS ACTION!

Conned by a lie that wouldn't have fooled a Girl Scout.

JEAN PAUL...THIS WAY IS WRONG--

YOU'RE A *VICTIM*, JEAN PAUL. YOUR FATHER AND THAT HELLISH ORDER HE SERVED TWISTED YOUR MIND FROM INFANCY ON AND YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT.

BUT YOU DO NOW. YOU CAN STOP BEING--

--HIS PUPPET AND--

I AM *BATMAN*... BECAUSE IF I AM NOT...

...*I AM NOTHING!*

His clothes are heavily insulated. The electricity won't stop him, won't even hurt him much.

Got to make him lose the suit. If we're physically equal, I've got more options.

I WILL NOT BE NOTHING!

Maybe I was wrong. He's lurching. Obviously in pain. And not surrendering. If he isn't stopped, he'll destroy himself—

—or me. Or both of us.

Unless I take him down—hard.

But what would that do to his mind—whatever hope he has left?

He's immensely powerful—

—but slow and awkward.

The costume is so bulky it cramps his movements.

I'd have no trouble escaping from him—sealing off the Cave and waiting him out.

But he'd be desperate. I don't know what he'd do.

He's my responsibility. I've got to save him.

I ASKED YOU TO LEAVE. BUT YOU WOULDN'T.

SO IT WON'T DO YOU ANY GOOD TO HIDE FROM ME. I'LL FIND YOU.

NOT ON THE BEST DAY YOU EVER HAD.

Not until I want to be found.

The night lenses. He'll be putting his into place, too.

It must be past five. The sun should be rising.

YOU CAN'T ESCAPE.

THE PASSAGE NARROWS--

--AND NARROWS FURTHER--

TOO SMALL...CAN'T GO ANY FURTHER...

The next few seconds will make all the difference...if he stops now, or removes the mask—

NOT GIVING UP, ARE YOU?

Perfect. He's lost the suit but he's leaving the mask on...

...coming ahead...

HE LISTENS TO THE DISTANT DRIP OF WATER, THE FLAP OF BATS' WINGS--

THEN--

SO. YOU'VE GOT NO MORE ROOM TO RUN.

THE TUNNEL ENDS. BRUCE RISES, FEELING HIS MUSCLES LOOSEN, HIS BREATHING RETURN TO NORMAL--RISES AND WAITS.

--AND THE GRUNTS OF THE APPROACHING MAN WHO IS BOTH HIS PURSUER AND HIS QUARRY...

NEITHER HAVE YOU.

IT'S OVER, JEAN PAUL. PLEASE BELIEVE THAT.

NO!

THE BAFFLE IS STILL LOOSE--

--AND SUDDENLY THE CAVE IS FILLED WITH LIGHT--

--THAT STABS INTO LENSES MEANT ONLY FOR DARKNESS--

I CAN'T SEE--

...CAN'T SEE...

YOU ARE THE BATMAN--

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE BATMAN--

--AND I AM NOTHING...

NO RAGE OR FEAR IN THE VOICE NOW-- JUST AN ACHING LONELINESS--

--AND BRUCE SUDDENLY REALIZES THAT IT HAS BEEN THERE FROM THE BEGINNING...

YOU'LL TAKE ME TO THE POLICE?

NO. I PROBABLY SHOULD BUT I WON'T.

A LONG TIME AGO, I FELL THROUGH THAT OPENING. I HAVEN'T REALLY EVER *STOPPED* FALLING.

MAYBE IT'S TIME TO GO THE OTHER WAY--

--TIME FOR BOTH OF US TO LEAVE THE DARK.

YOU WERE WRONG WHEN YOU SAID YOU'RE NOTHING, YOU JUST DON'T KNOW *WHO* YOU ARE-- WHAT YOU MIGHT BECOME.

BUT YOU CAN LEARN. IT WON'T BE EASY AND YOU MIGHT FAIL--

--BUT YOU'VE GOT TO TRY.

THEN YOU...FORGIVE ME?

YES, I SUPPOSE I DO.

SOME DAY, I MAY EVEN FORGIVE MYSELF.

GO NOW, AND DON'T EVER LOOK BACK.

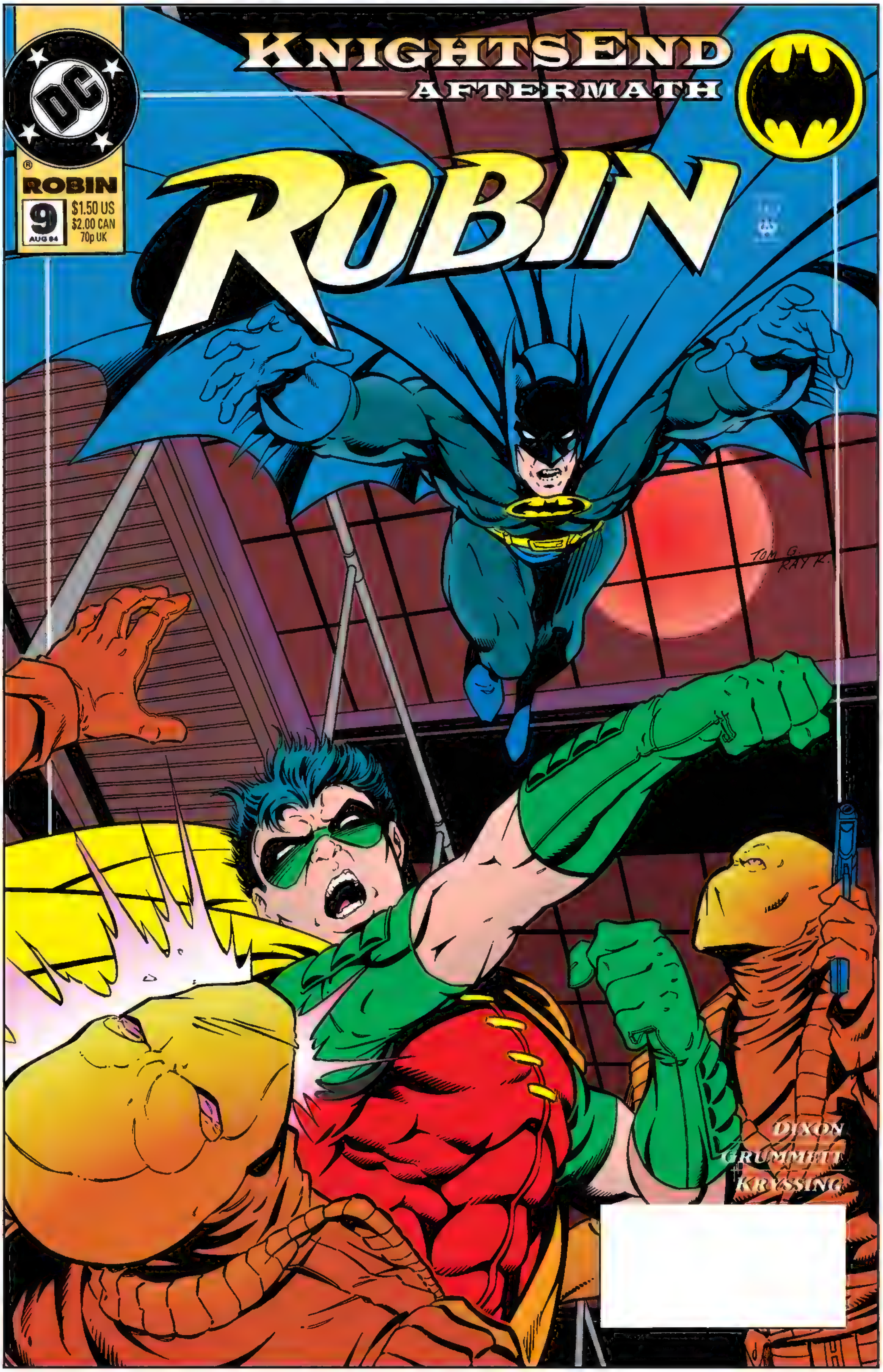
I WISH YOU WELL.

BELOW, THERE IS A REGION OF COLD AND ETERNAL NIGHT, AND IT MAY BE THAT THIS IS HIS TRUE HOME, A DESTINY HE CANNOT ESCAPE--

SOON, HE KNOWS HE MUST RETURN TO IT. BUT NOT TODAY.

TODAY, HE WALKS IN THE SUN.

Cover art by **TOM GRUMMETT** and **RAY KRYSSING**



THE TRIUMPH

STORY - CHUCK DIXON
LAYOUTS - TOM GRUMMETT
FINISHES - RAY KRYSSING
COLORS - ADRIENNE ROY
LETTERS - ALBERT DEGUZMAN
JORDAN B. GOREINKEL
ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNY O'NEIL
EDITOR

NOT SURE WHAT I'M GOING TO FIND DOWN HERE.

NOT SURE I EVEN WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED.

BRUCE?

BRUCE?

NIGHT VISION'S BLURRED. THE CAVE IS IN DEEP DARKNESS.

PLEASE DON'T LET THIS BE JEAN PAUL.

IT'S ME, TIM.

JEAN PAUL VALLEY IS GONE.

I DON'T KNOW. AND, RIGHT NOW, I DON'T CARE.

TO WHERE?

I SUPPOSE I SHOULD FEEL... GOOD ABOUT ALL THIS. I'VE WON IT ALL BACK, HAVEN'T I?

BRUCE?

SORRY. I'M TIRED.

BUT MY MIND'S RACING. IT WON'T LET ME SLEEP. I'VE BEEN SITTING HERE THINKING...

2

ALL OF THIS HAS BEEN DUE TO MY POOR JUDGMENT.

I LEFT THE CITY IN UNSTABLE HANDS. JEAN PAUL WAS A DISASTROUS CHOICE.

BUT THERE WASN'T TIME...

NO EXCUSE! THERE'S NO MARGIN FOR ERROR HERE. I SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR ANY CONTINGENCY! I SHOULD HAVE HAD A SUCCESSOR IN THE WINGS.

UNTIL I FOUND OUT ABOUT JEAN PAUL'S... INDISCRETIONS I WAS PREPARED TO LIVE THE REST OF MY LIFE AS BRUCE WAYNE AND NOTHING MORE.

NOW I'M BACK AND IT'S AS IF NOTHING HAS HAPPENED.

I HAVE TO RETHINK IT ALL, MAKE SOME CHANGES. I'M GOING TO REAPPRAISE A LOT OF THINGS ABOUT BRUCE WAYNE... AND BATMAN.

WE'LL TALK LATER.

NOW, WHAT DID HE MEAN BY ALL THAT?

3

SUDDENLY IT ALL CATCHES UP WITH ME.

I'VE BEEN AWAKE FOR NEARLY FORTY-EIGHT HOURS.

TRACKING JEAN PAUL WITH NIGHTWING.

CATCHING UP WITH BRUCE.

FIGHTING FROM ONE END OF GOTHAM TO THE OTHER.

NOW IF THE HOUSE WILL STAY QUIET UNTIL AT LEAST NOON...

TIM!

ARE YOU GOING TO SLEEP THE WHOLE DAY AWAY?

WHUZZ...?

4

FEEL LIKE I JUST LAY DOWN.

T'DAY'S THE DAY YER FATHER AND YOU ARE GOIN' T'LOOK FOR THAT CAR Y'BEEN DREAMIN' ABOUT.

I AIN'T WAITIN' BREAKFAST ON YER.

--EASY ACCESS FOR YOUR WHEELCHAIR, MR. DRAKE. AND SHE'S NOT A BAD-LOOKING RIDE EITHER.

I'M STILL NOT SURE.

I LIKE IT, DAD.

I WANTED SOMETHING SPORTIER FOR YOU, TIM.

IF HE ONLY KNEW.

IT'S OKAY. WE CAN GET SOMETHING ELSE WHEN YOU'RE UP AND AROUND.

WISH I SHARED YOUR CONFIDENCE, SON. I STILL HAVE MONTHS OF THERAPY BEFORE I'M OUT OF THIS CHAIR.

ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT IS SLEEPING.

WE'LL TAKE IT. ANY REASON WE CAN'T HAVE IT TODAY?

NOT A REASON IN THE WORLD, MR. DRAKE.

BUT EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE CONSPIRING TO KEEP ME AWAKE.

TELEPHONE CALL, TIM!

5

ARIANA? IT'S BEEN SO LONG...

I KNOW. I'VE CALLED AND CALLED...

I'VE BEEN... OUT A LOT. FAMILY STUFF.

OH.

MY AUNT'S GIVING ME THE AFTERNOON OFF. COULD YOU COME DOWNTOWN? I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.

CLICK

WELL... I'M SURE IF I COULD GET AWAY...

IS THAT YOUR GIRLFRIEND, TIM? WHY DON'T YOU GO SEE HER? TAKE HER FOR A RIDE IN THE VAN?

DAD...

IT'S ALL RIGHT! MRS. MAC AND I CAN HANDLE THINGS AROUND HERE.

TIM? YOU SOUND LIKE YOU DON'T WANT TO--

NO! I JUST THOUGHT THAT-- IT'S JUST THAT I HAD SOME STUFF I HAD TO--

TIM! TAKE THE GIRL OUT. HERE'S TWENTY! HAVE A GOOD TIME!

THANKS, DAD.

IT'S A *NICE* CAR, TIM.

I GUESS. YOU WANTED TO TALK, ARIANA?

6

I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN WEEKS. AND WHEN I CALL YOUR HOUSE MRS. MCILVAINE DOESN'T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE.

LOOK, ARIANA, I--

LET ME TALK, TIM.

IT'S LIKE YOU LIVE ANOTHER LIFE. I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE OR WHO YOU'RE WITH.

YOU HAVE SO MANY SECRETS. WELL, I HAVE ONE TOO.

A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO? WHEN YOU STOOD ME UP?

I WENT OUT WITH GLENN DOPPLER. I--

I'M SORRY, TIM. I WAS JUST SO ANGRY AND...

CAN YOU--

--FORGIVE ME?

OOH!

SLAM!

WHUH?

YOU'RE HOME EARLY, SON.

UH...YEAH.

CAN MRS. MAC WARM YOU SOME DINNER?

I'D RATHER JUST GO TO BED, DAD.

YOU DO THAT. SEE YOU IN THE MORNING, SON.

AT LAST. JUST ME AND EIGHT HOURS' SLEEP.

GONNA FEEL GOOD TO LIE DOWN.

AND NOW I CAN'T SLEEP.

THINKING ABOUT WHAT BRUCE SAID.

WHAT CHANGES IS HE GOING TO MAKE?

TIME TO THINK ABOUT THAT IN THE MORNING.

IN THE MORNING...

COMES THE DAWN.

8

GUESS I'LL SLEEP TOMORROW NIGHT.

HE DIDN'T WAIT FOR ME.

IS THIS ONE OF THE "CHANGES" HE TALKED ABOUT?

WELL, THE JOB'S STILL MINE UNTIL HE TELLS ME OTHERWISE.

DON'T HAVE TO GUESS WHERE HE'S GONE.

POLICE SCANNERS ARE FULL OF IT.

HOSTAGE SITUATION AT THE MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES.

SO WHAT'S THE STORY, COMMISH?

FAILED HEIST AT ONE OF THE EXHIBITS, BULLOCK. NOT SURE HOW MANY PERPS. LOOKS LIKE THEY'VE TAKEN SOME UNIVERSITY STUDENTS HOSTAGE.

BEAUTIFUL. IS TACTICAL PREPARED TO MOVE IN?

HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS IS TRYING TO REACH THEM FIRST, RENEE. SO FAR THERE'S NO ANSWER.

THE MUSEUM'S A *MAZE*. I WANT TO TRY EVERYTHING ELSE BEFORE WE SEND COPS IN.

I SAW THE SIGNAL. YOU HAD IT REPAIRED.

YES. I ONLY HOPE IT'S NOT A *MISTAKE*. THERE'RE ALREADY *ENOUGH* VARIABLES IN THIS SITUATION.

AND AFTER LAST NIGHT I'M WONDERING IF WE'LL EVER SEE HIM. *AGAIN*.

10

SNEAKY TIME.

TRICK IS NOT TO GET SHOT BY POLICE SNIPERS.

BATMAN'S ALREADY HERE.

I PICKED UP THE BATMOBILE'S HOMING SIGNAL.

SHOULD BE EASY TO FIND HIM IN HERE WITH OUR HEADSET RADIOS.

THIS PLACE IS SPOOKY AT NIGHT.

EVEN THE AIR SMELLS OLD.

BATMAN? IT'S ROBIN. ARE YOU READING ME?

BATMAN?

HE CAN'T PICK UP MY SIGNAL.

OR HE CAN'T ANSWER.

OR HE WON'T ANSWER.

CAN'T SAY I LIKE ANY OF THOSE POSSIBILITIES.

SO I'M ON MY OWN FOR NOW.

I'LL GET THIS GUY TO TELL ME WHERE THE REST OF THE GANG IS.

THAT'S WHERE BATMAN WILL BE.

12

OOP!

SORRY, LADY.

GREAT.

NOW I'M IN TROUBLE.

WHOA!

STOP RIGHT THERE, BRAT!

IS HE SERIOUS?

13

WE GOT THE EXITS CHAINED, KID.

YOU CAN'T GET OUT.

DON'T MAKE ME CHASE YOU, KID.

HEY!

I HEARD GUNSHOTS. THAT YOU, SLICK?

YOU THERE, SLICK?

THIS COULD BE FUN.

THIS GADGET DIGITALLY LOWERS MY VOICE AN OCTAVE.

IT'S NOTHIN'. BUSTED A FEW CAPS AT A STATUE. GETTIN' ANTSY, I GUESS.

WE'LL GET YOUR BUTT BACK HERE.

YOU GUYS ARE IN THE EAST WING, RIGHT?

WEST WING, STUPID. THE VIKING EXHIBIT, REMEMBER?

YEAH.

ARIANA AND I WERE HERE A MONTH AGO. LOTS OF VIKING ARTIFACTS MADE OF GOLD.

THAT MUST BE WHAT THEY WERE PLANNING ON STEALING.

ALL THAT DANEGELD, LOOT THE VIKINGS EXTORTED FROM THE PORTS THEY RAIDED.

A GOOD HAUL FOR ONE NIGHT'S WORK.

BUT THEY DIDN'T PLAN ON RUNNING INTO STUDENTS WORKING AFTER HOURS ON RESTORATIONS.

SLICK, WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU? WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT'S GOIN' DOWN!

THAT IDIOT'S PROBABLY GOT HIMSELF LOST.

15

THIS IS SLICK. THE COPS HAVE THE PLACE LOCKED UP TIGHT.

WHERE ARE THE OTHER GUYS? CAN ANY OF THEM SEE OUTSIDE?

DON'T WORRY ABOUT *THEM*. LEON'S GOT THE MAIN ENTRANCE AND DIGGER'S ON THE ELEVATOR TO THE GARAGES.

WHY AM I *TALKING* TO YOU, SLICK? YOU JUST GET BACK HERE.

OKAY.

WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO START DEALING WITH THE COPS TO GET OUT OF HERE.

SO THE CLOCK STARTS TICKING.

HOPE BATMAN'S SCANNING THE FREQUENCIES.

WHUZZAT?

16

'ZAT YOU, DIGGER?

WHAT'S GOIN' ON? YOU HURT?

DIGGER?

Y'KNOW, MATES, IF THIS ALL GOES SOUR WE'LL PROLL'Y BE SHOOTIN' YOU TWO FIRST, AYE?

AIN'T THAT A PAIN IN THE--

OI! WHO'RE YOU GLARIN' AT?

17

DON'T BELIEVE THIS...

SLICK! DIGGER! CAN YOU HEAR ME, LEON?

...I DOZED OFF!

THE PIGS ARE *TRYING* SOMETHING. I'LL PICK UP A PHONE. YOU PICK OUT VICTIM NUMBER ONE.

WE START NAILING A HOSTAGE EVERY FIFTEEN MINUTES UNTIL WE GET A FREE RIDE *OUTTA* HERE.

SHOULD I MOVE NOW, WHILE THERE'S ONLY *TWO* OF THEM?

SHOULD I WAIT FOR BATMAN?

I WANT TO BACK HIS PLAY, NOT SPOIL IT.

YOU WANT TO BE OUR FIRST *BARGAINING* CHIP, EINSTEIN?

I...I...

18

KRASH

BRRRPPPT

YES!

WHAT WAS I WORRIED ABOUT?

OOPS.

NO TIME TO THINK ABOUT HOW CRAZY THIS STUNT IS.

HUH?

20

UNNH!

YOU--YOU--LEFT YOURSELF WIDE OPEN--

NO I DIDN'T.

YOU WERE THERE.

BUT YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO TALK TO ME. YOU SAID THERE MIGHT BE SOME CHANGES.

I KNOW I SHOULD HAVE LET YOU KNOW ABOUT JEAN PAUL--

FORGET IT, ROBIN. YOU DID THE RIGHT THING.

THE JOB'S STILL YOURS IF YOU WANT IT.

NOW, LET'S GET OUT OF GORDON'S WAY.

21

"HE'S HAD A LONG NIGHT."

COMMISSIONER! I HAVE A MUSEUM GUARD ON THE PHONE. HE SAYS THE PERPS HAVE ALL BEEN TAKEN DOWN!

THANK GOD.

THAT'S THE GREEN LIGHT, GUYS!

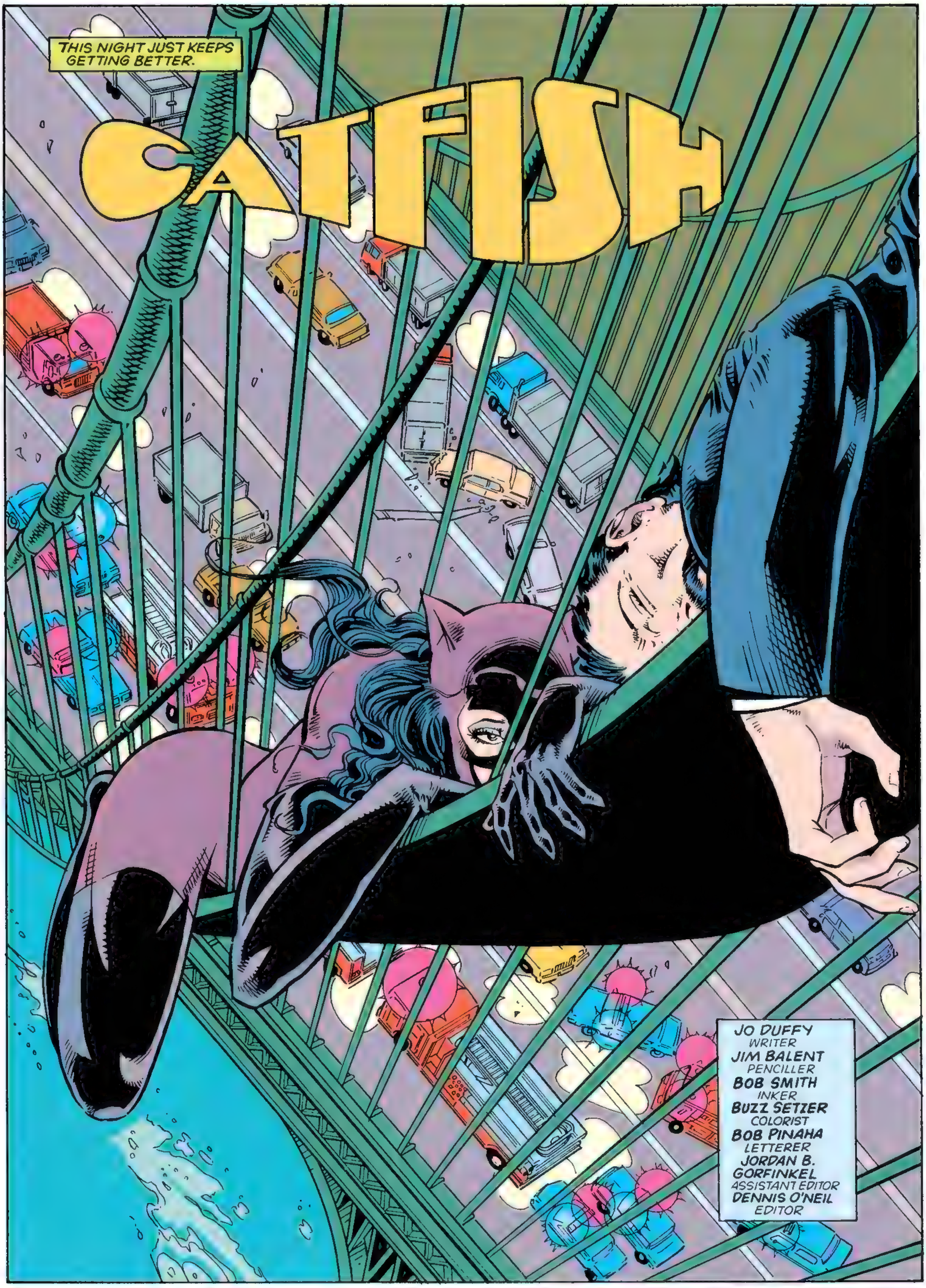
SOME OVERTIME AND EXTRA PAPERWORK AND A HAPPY ENDING, COMMISSIONER.

REALLY, RENEE? HOW CAN ANY OF US BE SURE?

AFTER EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED...

...HOW CAN WE BE SURE OF ANYTHING?

Cover art by JIM BALENT


THIS NIGHT JUST KEEPS GETTING BETTER.
CATFISH
JO DUFFY
WRITER
JIM BALENT
PENCILLER
BOB SMITH
INKER
BUZZ SETZER
COLORIST
BOB PINAHA
LETTERER
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL
ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNIS O'NEIL
EDITOR

IT STARTED, AS SO MANY DO, WITH A CAPER.

SOMETHING I NEEDED TO STEAL. SOMEONE I NEEDED TO STEAL IT FROM...

...AND, UNLIKE A LOT OF MY CAPERS, ALL IN THE NAME OF TWENTY-FOUR KARAT ALTRUISM... AND LONG-AGO LOVE.

THIS **WAS** ONE OF MY SMOOTHEST SCHEMES EVER...

...UNTIL ALL **HELL** BROKE LOSE!

TWO COWLED, BAT-EARED IDIOTS SHOWED UP AND STARTED THROWING TESTOSTERONE AROUND, HITTING AND YELLING...

...AND THE BULLETS STARTED TO FLY.

THINGS BEGAN EXPLODING, THE MAN I WAS AFTER TRIED TO SKIP WITH THE GOODS...

...AND THE CHOPPER I HITCHED A RIDE ON HIT A BRIDGE TOWER AND BLEW!

WHEN YOU LIVE IN GOTHAM CITY, AND YOU WORK OUTSIDE THE LAW, YOU GET TO KNOW...

...THAT TANGLING WITH THE BATMAN...OR MORE RECENTLY, THE BATMEN... IS THE PRICE OF DOING BUSINESS.

SEEMS THE PAIR OF THEM DON'T GET ALONG.

LORD KNOWS WHY THEY PICKED TONIGHT, WHERE I WAS WORKING, TO HOLD THE TITLE BOUT.

BUT, IF THE HUMAN FIREBALL THAT HIT THE WATER A FEW MINUTES AGO WAS WHO IT LOOKED LIKE...

...THE CHAMP STILL HOLDS THE TITLE, AND THE CHALLENGER IS OUT.

UNLESS THAT CAR I HEARD BLOW A WHILE AGO GOT THE CHAMP.

I'M BETTING NOT. HE'S MY DEAREST OPPONENT...

...AND HAS MORE LIVES THAN A CAT!

Uh... LADY? CAT-LADY?

WONDERFUL. THE MAN WHOSE FLYING LANDED US UP HERE.

H-HOW'RE WE GONNA GET DOWN?

PRIVATE PILOT OF PENN SELKIRK, MUNITIONS BROKER WHO, HOPING TO EXPAND HIS MERCHANDISE INTO CYBER-NETIC WEAPONRY...

...STOLE THE PROTO-TYPE AND PLANS FOR A DEVICE I'VE GOT TO HAVE.

THERE HE WAS, IN HIS PENTHOUSE STRONGHOLD, SURROUNDED BY GUARDS...

...HOLDING THE CYBERNETIC NEURAL ENABLER...

...THE ONLY HOPE OF EVER HELPING ONE OF MY DEAREST FRIENDS TO WALK AGAIN.

I'D HAVE HAD IT, IF THOSE BAT-COWLED IMBECILES HADN'T BURST IN WITH THEIR ENTOURAGE...

...STARTING THE MAYHEM THAT STRANDED ME HERE!

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AND YOU, YOU SMUG, SNEERING SON OF A JUNKYARD DOG!

YOU THREW THE ENABLER INTO THE RIVER!

JUST TO KEEP ME FROM GETTING IT!

DAMN.

ATTENTION, CATWOMAN! THIS IS THE POLICE!

RELEASE THE CIVILIANS AND STEP INTO THE LIGHT!

WHAT...?

YOU ARE SURROUNDED! KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE WE CAN SEE THEM!

WE'RE COMING UP!

DON'T YOU COPS PAY ATTENTION?

I SAVED THESE MEN!

FOR THE ENABLER...

...IN THE WATER. I HATE WATER!

WANT TO ARREST SOMEONE, START WITH SELKIRK! IT'S HIS CHOPPER!

THE PILOT WILL CONFESS...

WHAP

...UNLESS HE WANTS ME TO COME AFTER HIM!

NO MORE STALLING. ONLY WAY OUT IS TO GET MY FUR WET...

...AND HOPE I SURVIVE!

USING A SKILL I LEARNED A LIFETIME AGO...

6

...FROM BRENDAN, OF THE FLYING O'BOYLES, STAR ACT OF THE CIRCUS GERMANICUS...

...UNTIL A CAR WRECK, AND A BOTCHED RESCUE ON A RAINY, SMALL-TOWN NIGHT...

...BROUGHT HIM DOWN. BROKE HIM.

HERE'S HOPING NOT TO LEARN HOW THAT FEELS!

OH, GERMANICUS... DO YOU REALLY THINK SHE CAN?

TAMSYN, YOU GOT TO HAVE FAITH.

BEN GURION MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

ALL THE YEARS WE KNOW HER, SHE NEVER LET US DOWN YET.

YOUR BROTHER NEEDS HER HELP. SHE'S NOT GONNA FAIL!

WHAT'S TAKING HER...?

THAT GADGET--THE THING BRENDAN NEEDS-- SHE TELLS ME IT WAS STOLEN BY A VERY NASTY FELLA.

SHE NEEDS A GOOD PLAN. PLANS TAKE TIME.

REMEMBER, SHE'S GOT MY COUSIN WILDER WITH HER. HE'S PRETTY TOUGH FOR A GUY WHO AIN'T SO STRONG.

BRENDAN RESTS NOW. HE'LL BE OKAY.

SINCE THE NIGHT THEY BROUGHT HIM IN, SOMEONE FROM THE CIRCUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN WITH HIM.

TALK ABOUT FAMILY TIES!

DON'T LAUGH. THINGS THAT HELP THE STATE OF MIND ARE HALF OF WHAT A PATIENT NEEDS.

ANY WORD ON THE OTHER HALF?

NO...THE SURGICAL TEAM'S STANDING BY, BUT...

...WITHOUT THAT ENABLER, THERE'S NO POINT.

MRS. O'BOYLE...? HOW'S YOUR BROTHER?

SLEEPING. ANY SIGN OF--?

NO WORD FROM MR. WILDER AND YOUR FRIEND.

BUT THERE'S BEEN A DEVELOPMENT. NOT GOOD.

WHEN THE ENABLER WAS STOLEN, THERE WERE REPORTS CATWOMAN WAS ON THE SCENE.

IF *SHE'S* TAKEN AN INTEREST, WHAT HOPE HAS YOUR FRIEND...

... OF GETTING THE ENABLER SAFELY TO RESPONSIBLE HANDS?

YOU...

YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED 'BOUT DAT.

9

DR. HUBBELL! DR. NICHOLE!

DR. VERDUGO!

THIS IS MS. O'BOYLE AND MR. GERMANICUS... RELATIVES OF THE PATIENT...

...AND CHAIM SAMSON, WHO'LL BE PERFORMING THE OPERATION.

DR. HUBBELL DEVELOPED THE ENABLER.

YOU MUST BE A SAINT! TO HAVE INVENTED SOMETHING SO WONDERFUL...

HELPING OTHERS IS MY TOP PRIORITY.

IF ONLY THE DEVICE HAD BEEN TESTED, AND PATENTED... IN THE HANDS OF A PROPER MEDICAL FIRM...

BEFORE YOU KNOW, THAT GADGET BE BACK.

THEN YOU TEST IT ON OUR BRENDAN!

AFTER THAT, YOU MAKE ALL THE MONEY YOU WANT!

MR. WILDER... ARE YOU SURE SHE SURVIVED?

I AM TOLERABLY CERTAIN, CALEB.

SHE LEAPT WITH FORETHOUGHT AND GRACE.

BUT... IT'S SUCH A LONG WAY. AND SO COLD.

CATS ARE SURVIVORS. OUR MISTRESS DOUBLY SO, AND MOST *RESOURCEFUL*.

WHEN YOU'VE BEEN IN HER SERVICE...

...YOU LEARN *FAITH*.

IF YOU GOT SO MUCH FAITH, WHY'RE WE HERE TO SAVE HER?

AS THE ISLAMIC PROPHET SO PRUDENTLY ADVISED, TRUST IN GOD, BUT TIE UP YOUR CAMEL.

HERE THE CURRENT WASHES MOST THINGS ASHORE.

:GA-AAA- AASP!:

IT'S HER!

INARGUABLY. NOW, IF YOU WOULD BE SO GOOD AS TO...

OH, YEAH! RIGHT...

KOFF KOFF

GOOD WORK, GUYS. HOPE THERE'S A HOT DRINK WAITING.

STICKLERS MIGHT SAY WILDER SAVED ME. I PREFER TO THINK I SAVED MYSELF WHEN I HIRED HIM.

...IF I MAY OBSERVE, YOUR DRIVER, CALEB, IS A MOST PROMISING YOUNG MAN.

I TRUST HE'LL WORK OUT BETTER...THAN HIS UNFORTUNATE PREDECESSORS.

HERE'S HOPING.

HE'S OFF TO A GOOD START.

BUT WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM. SELKIRK TOSSED THE PACKAGE INTO THE RIVER.

I'D BET HE'S GOT A WAY TO TRACK IT. SO IF WE'RE GOING TO BEAT HIM...

12

"...WE'LL HAVE TO ACT FAST."

...BE GOING WITH YOU, TO SHOW YOU WHERE TO LOOK.

ANYTHING YOU SAY.

I LIKE A GIRL WHO PACKS HER OWN WET-SUIT.

NIXY NAIAD
MARINE SALVAGE

RUPERT AND JEREMY ARE OLD FRIENDS, NICE KIDS WITH A LITTLE STREAK OF LARCENY.

I BOUGHT THEM THEIR BOAT, SO WHEN I SAY JUMP, THEY ASK, "HOW HIGH?"

THE PLAN WAS TO PAY OTHER PEOPLE TO GET WET.

I NEVER COUNTED ON A SUNKEN TREASURE THIS IMPORTANT.

13

YOU SAID THERE MIGHT BE RIVALS...?

BAD MEN, RUPERT. VERY BAD. IF WE SEE ANYONE, YOU AND JEREMY CLEAR OUT!

I'M HOPING THE BOSS IS IN JAIL, BUT WE CAN'T COUNT ON IT.

WATCH FOR US.

AT THE FIRST SIGNAL, WE SHALL BE LIKE THE WIND.

CALEB'S IN POSITION?

AND FULLY BRIEFED. YOU NEED HAVE NO CONCERNS.

BEST OF LUCK.

WATER... HORRIBLE...

...UNLESS IT'S WARM, SCENTED, AND FULL OF BUBBLES...

...OR WRAPPED AROUND BIG, FROSTY ICE CUBES.

THIS DOESN'T QUALIFY.

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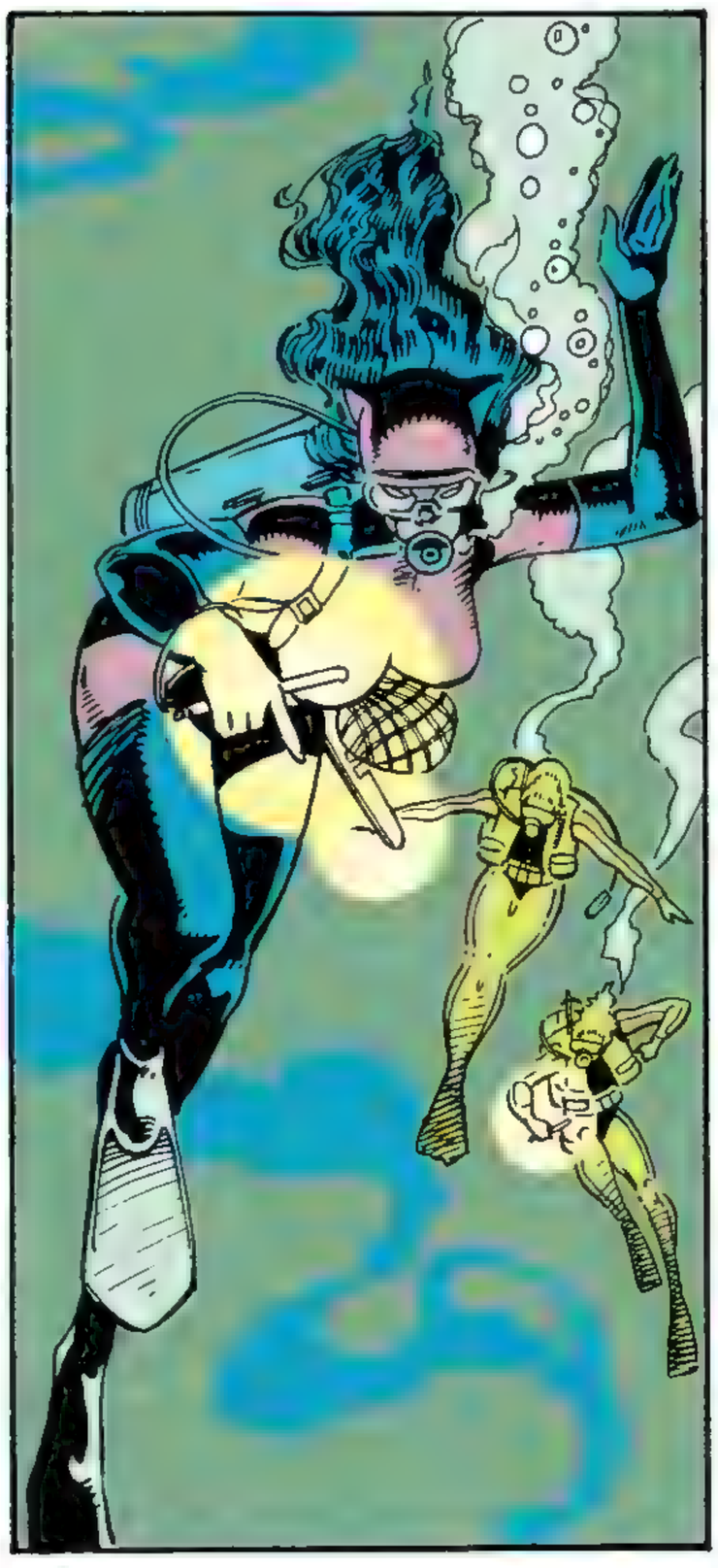

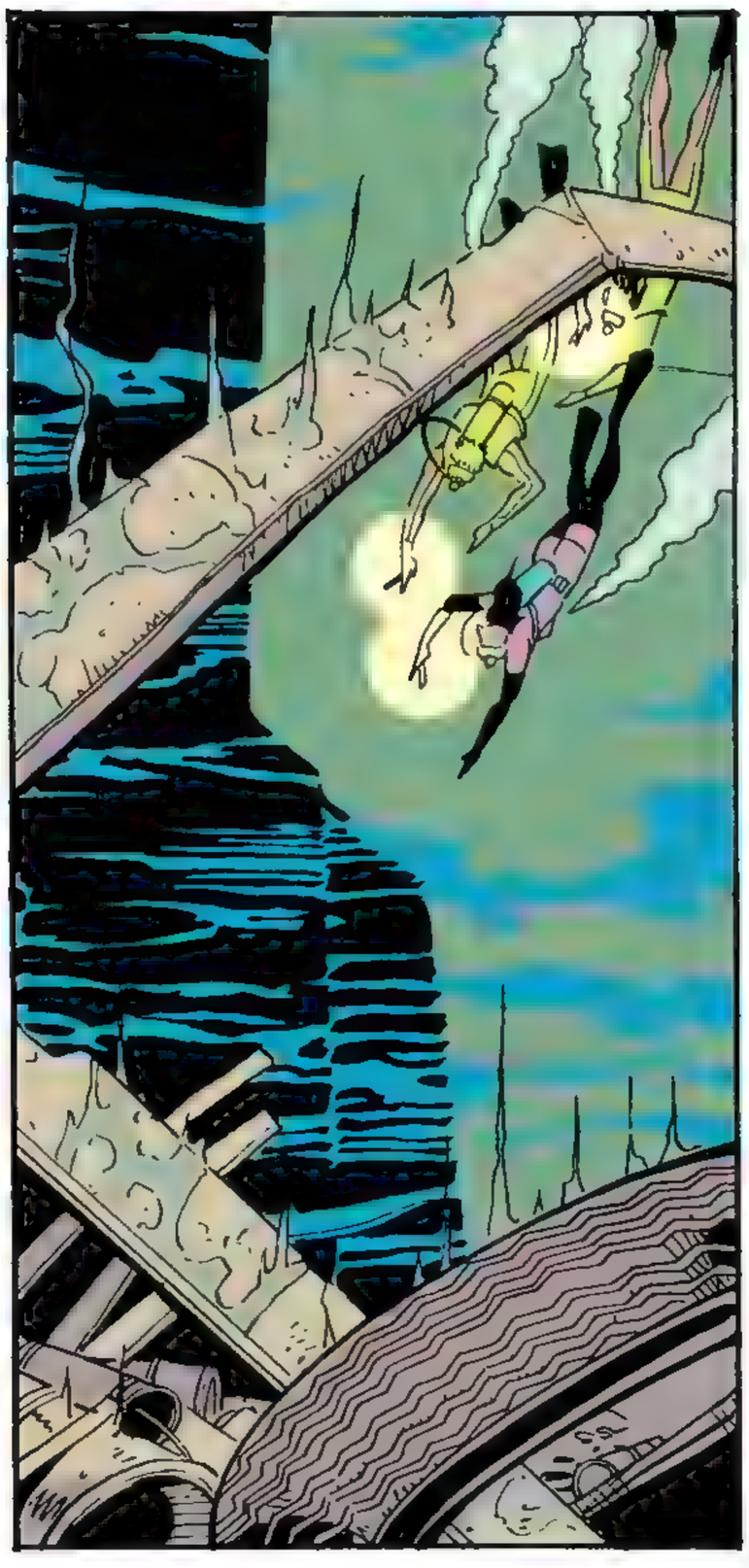

SCORE!

GET IT LOOSE, AND WE'RE OUT OF HERE.

WHAT--?!

SELKIRK...!

16

SNEK

SUCK RIVER-SLUDGE...

...COWARD!

GOOD MORNING, CATWOMAN. I TRUST YOU ENJOYED YOUR SWIM?

SELKIRK!

OF COURSE, SELKIRK. YOU CAN HARDLY HAVE EXPECTED ANYONE ELSE.

PLEASE DON'T MAKE ANY SUDDEN MOVES OR ATTEMPT TO FREE YOURSELF...

...UNLESS YOU'D CARE TO SEE YOUR UNFORTUNATE FRIENDS SPITTED.

GF 2/86

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WHY AREN'T YOU IN JAIL?!

BECAUSE I BAILED HIM OUT!

YOU DIDN'T SERIOUSLY EXPECT ME TO SETTLE FOR WHAT THE RESEARCH FIRMS WERE WILLING TO PAY--

...AFTER DEAR PENN TOLD ME HOW PLUMP THE PRIZES WERE FOR ADVANCED CYBERNETIC WEAPONS.

SO YOU SOLD OUT THE PEOPLE WHO FUNDED YOU...

...AND EVERYONE COUNTING ON YOUR RESEARCH?!

PLEASE. I'M A BUSINESS-WOMAN FIRST! I THOUGHT YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, COULD RESPECT THAT.

ENOUGH! I WANT THE ENABLER NOW...

...OR THESE YOUNG MEN WILL BE CARRION!

FINE. RELEASE MY FRIENDS...

...AND I HOPE YOU CHOKE!

SPLASH

THAT ROTTEN...

...RUPERT AND JEREMY ARE A DEAD WEIGHT. IF I DON'T HURRY...

...THEY'LL DROWN.

...THINK YOU'VE WON, YOU...

THE CAVALRY.

TAKE COMFORT. IT SEEMS TO BE A NICE, CLEAN WOUND.

AFTER A SWIM IN THE *RIVER*? I DOUBT IT.

GOOD JOB, WILDER. READY FOR *PHASE TWO*.

THIS WAY, MY DEAR.

I'M AFRAID MY PENTHOUSE WAS DESTROYED, SO...

...DRIVER, TAKE US TO THE *DARRACOURT PLAZA.*

VERY GOOD, SIR.

TO US.

TO THE CONSUMER INTEREST CATWOMAN'S ACTIVITIES WILL CREATE...

...WHETHER THE BIONICS *WORK* OR NOT!

PENN...?

DRIVER, WHY HAVE WE STOPPED?

I'M SORRY, SIR. THERE'S A CAT IN THE ROAD.

CAT--?!

YES, SIR. WHY DON'T YOU OPEN THE DOOR AND *SPEAK* TO HER?

I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND *MY DRIVER* FILLING IN. YOURS HAD A *SUDDEN ATTACK.*

STEP OUT OF THE CAR AND HAND ME THE ENABLER.

OH, AND DR. HUBBELL...

.....

KEEP OUT

21

BY THE TIME I ACQUIRED IT, SELKIRK HAD REALIZED THE ENABLER WASN'T READY...

...TO TURN HUMAN WARRIORS INTO CYBORGS. HE PLANNED TO SPREAD A FEW RUMORS...

...AND CHEAT HIS OVERANXIOUS BUYERS.

BUT WEAPONS USAGE WASN'T WHAT THE ENABLER WAS DESIGNED FOR.

THE REAL PLAN WAS TO HELP THE INJURED WALK.

HUBBELL'S STAFF--THE ONES WHO'D REALLY MADE THE DEVICE-- WORKED WITH BRENDAN'S DOCTORS...

...TRYING TO MAKE A MIRACLE. DID HE SUCCEED? NOT FOR ME TO SAY.

MAYBE THE SECRET WAS BRENDAN'S CERTAINTY THE DEVICE WOULD WORK.

MAYBE IT WAS ALL THE SUPPORT HE HAD.

MAYBE FAITH MADE THE MIRACLE. FAITH...

...AND LOVE.

THE END.

Cover art by JOE QUESADA and KARL KESEL

HE STUMBLES THROUGH THE DARK UNDERBELLY OF THE CITY. A MAN WHO WAS CLOSE TO THE EDGE--

HIS BODY IS WRACKED WITH PAIN FROM THE BATTLE HE HAS JUST LOST. HIS EVERY MOVEMENT HURTS.

BUT HE HARDLY NOTICES.

THE PAIN HE FEELS IS THE PAIN OF HUMILIATION AND DESPAIR.

THE PAIN OF DEFEAT.

WHO'S THAT?

ALL THAT HE DREAMT OF, ALL THAT HE WORKED FOR, HAS BEEN BRUTALLY STRIPPED FROM HIM--

LOOKS LIKE A COP!

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

HE HAS NOTHING LEFT.

UNTIL TONIGHT, HE WAS A HERO.

HE WAS THE BATMAN, HEIR TO A LEGEND, THE DARK KNIGHT, GUARDIAN OF GOTHAM. HE HAD A PURPOSE. HE HAD A CITY. HE HAD A PEOPLE.

NOW, HE HAS NOTHING. NOW, HE IS NO ONE.

DESPITE THE FIRE'S WARMTH, THE WIND'S RAZOR EDGE CUTS DEEP IN HIS FLESH, AND THE DARK NIGHT'S CHILL HAS SEEPED INTO HIS HEART.

AZRAEL

ALAN GRANT: script
MIKE VOSBURG: penciller
RON McCAIN: inker
DAVE HORNUNG: colorist
KEN BRUZENAK: letterer
DENNIS O'NEIL: consulting editor
NEAL POZNER: editor

AZRAEL created by
Dennis O'Neil & Joe Quesada

I'M F-F-FREEZING...!

THAT'S *OUR* PITCH! HE HAS NO RIGHT-!

WE OUGHTA GANG UP! CHASE HIM AWAY!

N-NOT ME! HE LOOKS EVIL! I'D *RATHER* JUST FREEZE!

CAN'T STAND AROUND HERE ALL NIGHT! I'M GONNA FIND SOMEPLACE NEW!

♫ - FIRST ONE ON YOUR BLOCK TO HAVE YOUR BOY COME HOME IN A BOX! ♫

♫ AN' IT'S A-ONE, A-TWO-A-THREE A-WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR? DON'T ASK ME, I DON'T GIVE A DAMN! NEXT STOP IS VIETNAM! ♫

HEY, GUYS! JOIN IN THE NEXT CHORUS!

♫ FIVE-SIX-SEVEN - OPEN UP THEM PEARLY GATES! AIN'T NO TIME TO WONDER WHY, WHOOPEE WE'RE ALL GONNA DIE! ♫

"FEEL LIKE I'M FIXIN' TO DIE" BY COUNTRY JOE AND THE FISH.

'S A MATTER, GUYS? YA AIN'T SINGIN'!

WHY YA HANGIN' OUT HERE, ANYWAY? 'S COLD!

COZZA *HIM*, LEGS-- THE BIG GUY IN THE SPANDEX!

HE'S HOGGIN' THE FIRE--AN WE AIN'T ARGUIN'! *ERN* SAYS HE LOOKS *EVIL*!

HE *DOES*!

AHH. *I'LL* SORT THE CREEP OUT! I AIN'T AFRAID A' NO DUDE IN TIGHTS!

MAN, I ONCE WENT UP AGAINST THE *BATMAN* HIMSELF!

I REMEMBER THAT! YOU AN' THAT KID *ANARKY* BEAT HIM TO A *PULP*, RIGHT?

WELL, SORTA.

NEVER MIND THAT, ANYWAY. LOOK WHAT I FOUND-! JUST LYIN' ON THE ROAD, COUPLA BLOCKS AWAY!

WE'RE PARTYIN' TONIGHT, FOLKS--

--JUST AS SOON'S I GET RIDDA THE BIG GUY!

He sits like a broken statue, barely taking in the filth and squalor that surrounds him, the sour stench of old urine and methylated spirit.

How did it end up like this? He was trained to be a winner. He doesn't understand defeat.

Bits and pieces whirl in his mind as the system tries to make sense of what has happened.

Forced into him from childhood, it is a complex blend of hypnotic suggestion and subliminal education--

--over the years teaching him all the talents, skills and knowledge he would need to become what his father was, and his father before him, in a line stretching back nearly 700 years.

Azrael, the avenging angel--

POLICEMAN FOR A SECRET SOCIETY, THE MYSTERIOUS ORDER OF St. DUMAS-

--PUNISHER--

--ASSASSIN.

WAS HE STUPID? BLIND? HOW HADN'T HE FOUND OUT OVER THE YEARS? OF COURSE, HE KNOWS THE ANSWER--

THE SYSTEM. IT PROGRAMMED HIM NOT TO NOTICE ANYTHING UNTIL THE TIME CAME--

WAS IT ONLY A YEAR AGO HE WAS JEAN PAUL VALLEY, GRAD STUDENT AT GOTHAM U? IT SEEMS SO LONG. MORE HAS HAPPENED TO HIM IN THAT YEAR THAN MOST PEOPLE WOULD EXPERIENCE IN A DOZEN LIFETIMES--

--HIS FATHER DYING OF HORRIFIC WOUNDS-

--IMPRISONED BY THE DWARF NOMOZ. BEATEN MERCILESSLY BY THE GIANT HEINRICH--

UNTIL THE PIECES ALL SNAPPED INTO PLACE, AND HE **BECAME** WHAT THEY'D SPENT YEARS *MAKING* HIM--**AZRAEL**, THE PUNISHING ANGEL.

SMALL WONDER THE CRIPPLED **BRUCE** WAYNE CHOSE ***HIM*** TO CARRY THE MANTLE OF THE BAT. HE WAS PERFECTLY TRAINED FOR THE TASK OF ELIMINATING CRIME IN GOTHAM--

THE TALLY MAN-SCARECROW-BALLISTIC-GUNHAWK-LADY CLAYFACE--

HE'D TAKEN THEM ON, THE HOTSHOT KOOKS AND CRIMINALS, AND HE'D BEATEN THEM DECISIVELY.

EVEN **BANE**--THE HARDEST OF THEM ALL, THE ANIMAL WHO'D BROKEN THE FIRST BATMAN!

SO WHAT IF ONE MAN DIED IN A TORRENT OF MOLTEN METAL? ABATTOIR WAS A KILLER. HE DESERVED TO DIE!

AND IF ANOTHER--AN INNOCENT THIS TIME-DIED IN AGONY ON ABATTOIR'S TORTURE MACHINE...WELL, THAT WAS A PRICE WORTH PAYING.

A HARSH CITY NEEDS HARSH JUSTICE. NOBODY CAN ARGUE WITH THAT, CAN THEY?

BUT BRUCE WAYNE DID-AND HE TOOK BACK THE MANTLE OF THE BAT.

FOR MONTHS HE'S BEEN PLAGUED BY VISIONS--OF HIS FATHER, AND ST. DUMAS--ADVISING HIM, BERATING HIM, COMMANDING HIM. WHERE ARE THEY NOW, WHEN HE NEEDS THEM TO TELL HIM WHAT TO DO?

HEY, BIG GUY!

YA HOGGIN' THIS FIRE, OR CAN ANYBODY WARM UP?

BAD NIGHT ALL AROUND, YEAH?

HE SHOULD GET UP, GO. BUT HE HAS NO STRENGTH-NO MOTIVATION. HIS MIND IS A JIGSAW, AND THE PIECES DON'T FIT.

'S WRONG? BEAT UP BY SOME BIG-TIME HOODLUM?

HEY! THIS MAYBE AIN'T THE GOTHAM RITZ, BUT A GUY CAN BE *CIVIL*, RIGHT?

OR ARE YA A MUTE?

OR JUST AN *ANGST-RIDDEN* BASTICH?

HERE, HAVE A DRINK, MAYBE LOOSEN YER TONGUE.

NO? SUIT YASELF! 'S ALL THE MORE FOR ME!

YA'LL BE DRINKIN' IT SOON ENOUGH, PAL! MOST *EVERYBODY* ENDS UP DRINKIN' IT ON THESE STINKIN' STREETS!

WANNA KNOW *WHY*? BETCHA DON'T-- BUT I'M GONNA *TELL* YA ANYWAY!

'SNOT TA KEEP *WARM*, SEE-- OR EVEN TA GET *DRUNK*. 'S TA *NUMB* THE *PAIN*.

THE PAIN OF KNOWIN' WHEN THE CHIPS ARE REALLY *DOWN*, WHEN YA'VE SUNK TO THE *BOTTOM* AN' ONLY ANOTHER *HUMAN BEIN'* CAN GIVE YA A *HAND UP*--

--THAT OTHER HUMAN BEIN' WILL *SPIT* IN YER *EYE* AN' STEAL YER LAST CRUST!

Y'KNOW, I'VE OFTEN WONDERED--

IF THINGS HAD BEEN DIFFERENT AN' I WAS A *WINNER*, WHAT WOULD I BE LIKE? SAY I'D WON A BIG MEDAL-- DID THE COLLEGE LECTURE CIRCUIT, ALL THOSE BUSINESS DINNERS... HUNDRED THOUSAND BUCKS A YEAR!

WOULD *I* PASS BY GUYS LIKE ME? DREGS OF SOCIETY, FLOATIN' IN THE GUTTER?

AN' YA KNOW WHAT I FIGURE? TOO DARN *RIGHT* I WOULD!

THIS IS A *WINNER'S* WORLD! *LOSERS* DON'T COUNT FOR *SQUAT*!

I MEAN, LOOKIT *THEM*--

FINE FOLKS ONE AN' ALL--EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT THEY'RE *LOSERS*!

THAT'S *ERNIE*. USED TA BE AN ARCHITECT TILL THE BUSINESS FAILED. USED TA HAVE A BIG HOUSE TILL HIS MEDICAL INSURANCE RAN OUT. USED TA HAVE A *LIFE*, RIGHT ERN?

ZARINA--HER GRANDAD WAS A REAL INDIAN CHIEF. SHE SAYS THE FOLKS HERE GOT NO SOUL NO MORE. THEY'RE JUST EMPTY SHELLS, ZOMBIES.

YOU HAVE TO L-L-LAUGH, *LEGS*! IF YOU DIDN'T...!

"A *CITY* WITHOUT A *SOUL*...

"SPOOKY, HUH?"

WANNA HEAR A STORY? NO? I DON'T CARE!

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A GUY, JOINED THE *ARMY* 'COS THEY'D TEACH HIM A TRADE. NICE WIFE, TWO KIDS, BOY AN' A GIRL. AMERICAN DREAM.

THEN SOMEBODY STARTED A *WAR*, AN' THEY SENT THE GUY TA KILL COMMIES.

"NOW THIS GUY DIDN'T KNOW A *COMMIE* FROM AN *ESKIMO*-BUT HE WENT, 'COS THAT WAS HIS JOB AN' THAT'S WHY THEY PAID HIM AN' BESIDES IT WAS FOR *FREEDOM* AN' *DEMOCRACY*, RIGHT?

"WE WERE SAVIN' THE WORLD."

REMEMBER WHAT THE ASTRONAUT SAID WHEN HE LANDED ON THE MOON? "A SMALL STEP FER A MAN, A GIANT LEAP FER MANKIND"?

WELL, THAT GUY TOOK A SMALL STEP FER A MAN--

"BUT HIS *BODY* GOT LEFT BEHIND WHEN HIS *LEGS* TOOK THE GIANT LEAP!"

THEY SENT THE SURVIVIN' HALF HOME TO A HERO'S WELCOME AN WELFARE. HIS WIFE TRIED--

--BUT HECK, SHE WAS YOUNG AN' COULDN'T FACE A LIFETIME NURSIN' A CRIPPLE. DISAPPEARED WITH A SALESMAN FROM OHIO.

NEVER HEARD FROM THEM AGAIN. DOESN'T KNOW IF HIS KIDS ARE ALIVE OR DEAD. DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO FIND OUT.

SO, HOW'S YER *SELF-PITY* MATCH UP TA *THAT?*

C'MON, TAKE A DRINK! JUST ONE! I'M GETTIN' SICKA SPEAKIN' TO MYSELF!

THAT WAS *MINE*, YA CREEP! *I* FOUND IT! YA GOT NO *RIGHT* TA GO BREAKIN' IT!

I GAVE MY *LEGS* FER GUYS LIKE YOU-- AN' HOW DO YA REPAY ME? YA *SMASH* MY *BOOZE!*

SCUZZY CREEP, I'LL SHOW YA--

HEYY!

GO ON--HIT ME! A GUY WITHOUT LEGS IS EASY MEAT!

YEAH, GO ON--WALK AWAY! YA CAN'T RUN FROM YERSELF! YER A *LOSER*, CREEP-- JUST LIKE THIS CITY, YA AIN'T GOT A *SOUL*!

YOU'RE AT THE TOP OF A LONG SLIPPERY SLOPE! YOU MARK MY WORDS--

--YA'LL BE BACK HERE WITHIN A WEEK, AS DRUNK AS THE REST OF US!

YOU'LL SEE!

TH-THAT WAS REAL BRAVE, LEGS!

YEAH... WELL, I DON'T TAKE NO BULL FROM NOBODY--EVEN *BIG GUYS*, WIT' ALL THEIR MUSCLE!

BEST SEAT AT THE FIRE FOR YOU, BOY!

MAN, *YOU'RE* A HERO!

LET'S GET THE PARTY STARTED!

LEGS-- LOOK!

BIG GUY'S GONE, HUH? PITY FOR YOU!

THAT WAS OUR BOOZE YOU STOLE!

I FOUND IT!

STINKIN' LYIN' SKEL!

BIG GUY DIDN'T GO FAR.

WE-WE DIDN'T MEAN NOTHIN', MAN! IT WAS JUST A LITTLE FUN!

THEY'RE ONLY SKELS!

PEOPLE! THEY'RE *PEOPLE*, LIKE YOU.

*P*EOPLE-- LIKE HIM.

SAY IT!

P-PEOPLE! THEY'RE PEOPLE-- SAME AS *ME*! SAME AS *US*!

DON'T EVER FORGET IT. THEY'RE PEOPLE. TREAT THEM WITH *RESPECT*--WITH *DIGNITY*--

--OR YOU'LL ANSWER TO *ME*!

AIN'T YA GONNA CALL THE COPS ON US...?

I GUESS NOT! SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

THAT *WAS* OUR BOOZE, BY THE WAY, PAL!

THEY SAY FINDER'S KEEPERS--BUT I'LL TELL YA WHAT--

WE'RE HAVIN' A *PARTY.* WHY DON'TCHA JOIN US?

CAN YA *SING?*

THE EFFORT ALMOST DRAINED HIM. IT'S TAKING ALL HIS STRENGTH JUST TO STAND UPRIGHT. BUT THE CHILL IN HIS HEART SEEMS TO HAVE WARMED.

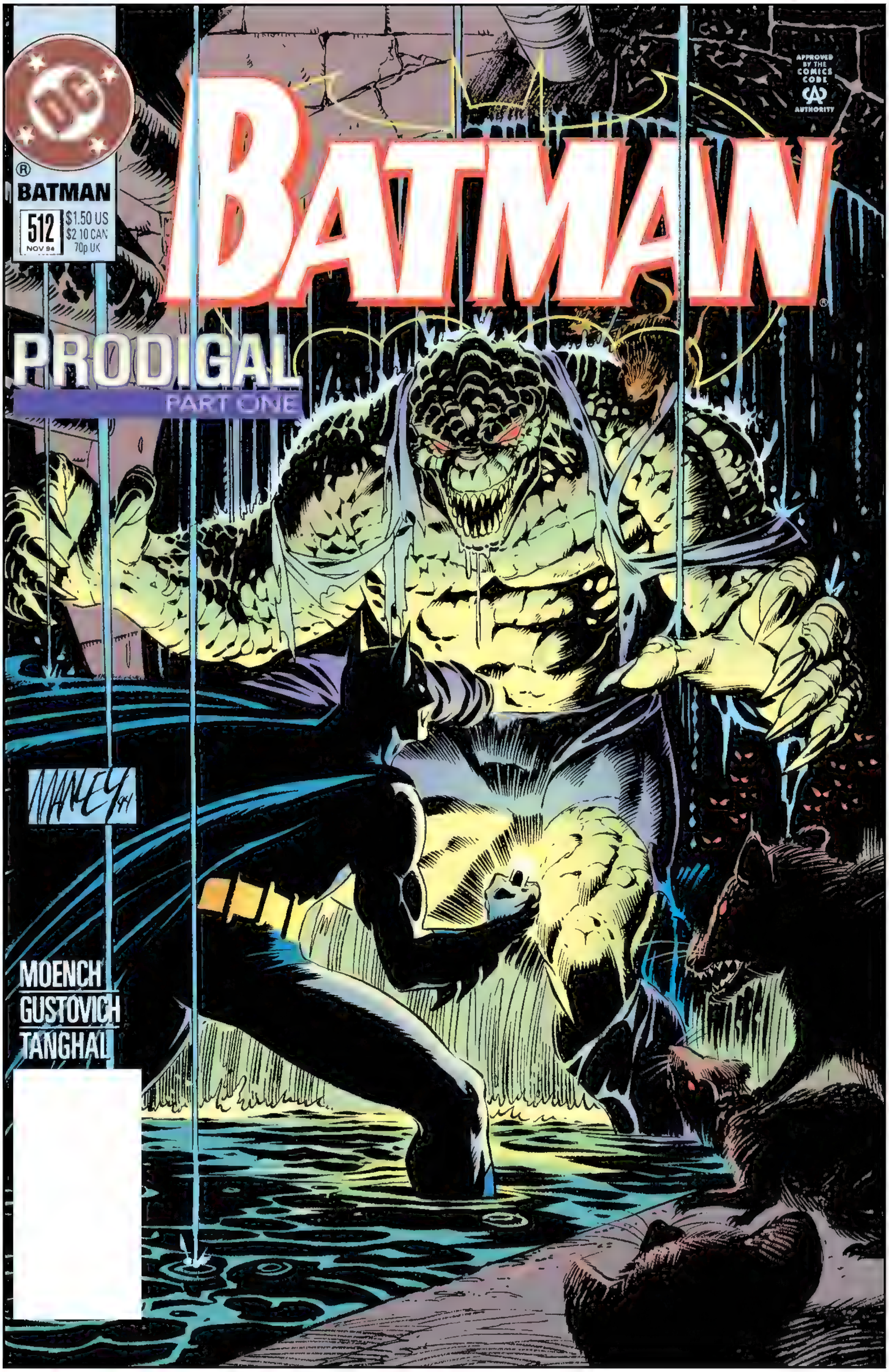
MAYBE HE HAS NOTHING. MAYBE HE'S NO ONE. BUT HE KNOWS ONE THING-

--AT BOTTOM, HE'S THE *SAME* AS *THEM.* HE'S PEOPLE.

AND THAT'S A START.

OH, ITS A-ONE, A-TWO A-THREE, A WHAT'R WE FIGHTIN' FOR?

Cover art by **MIKE MANLEY**



PRODIGAL: PART I

ROBIN and BATMAN

DOUG MOENCH - WRITER
MIKE GUSTOVICH & ROMEO TANGHAL - GUEST ARTISTS
ADRIENNE ROY - COLORIST
KEN BRUZENAK - LETTERER
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL - ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNY O'NEIL - EDITOR
BATMAN CREATED BY BOB KANE

THANK YOU, DICK.

YOU'RE... SURE ABOUT THIS? I MEAN, YOU JUST CAME BACK AND RECLAIMED-

NOW I HAVE TO DO SOME-THING ELSE, SOMETHING WHICH MEANS LEAVING THE MANOR... THE CAVE... GOTHAM.

TAKE CARE OF THEM...IN MY STEAD...AS I KNOW YOU WILL.

ROBIN'S RIGHT.

I MADE A MISTAKE IN CHOOSING JEAN PAUL... BUT THIS TIME THE LEGACY PASSES INTO PROPER HANDS.

BECAUSE I WAS FORCED TO.

SURE HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT.

WHAT WAS THAT?

NOTHING, TIM...JUST TALKING TO MYSELF.

SO TALK TO ME.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW... BATMAN?

TANK UP ON FUEL-- AND DROP SOME CRIME IN ITS TRACKS

GOTHAM RIVER!

WHUH-?

SPLASHH

THE WATER THRASHES AND CHURNS FOR JUST UNDER ONE MINUTE...

...THEN TURNS RED...

...AND STILL.

A MINUTE AFTER THAT, THE SATED PREDATOR SURFACES.

HIS ARM IS HEALED.

HE DECIDES IT IS TIME TO DO MORE THAN MERELY SURVIVE LIKE AN ANIMAL.

IT IS TIME TO SEEK THE REVENGE OF MAN.

SOMETHING WRONG, DICK?

NO... JUST... STRANGE...

...BEING BACK HERE IN THE MANOR,

YOU'VE GOT YOUR OWN HOME WITH YOUR FATHER, TIM... BUT I... I GREW UP HERE...

...AND EVEN IN A STATE LIKE THIS... DESERTED... NEGLECTED...

"...IT BRINGS BACK MEMORIES... OF HOW IT WAS AFTER BRUCE TOOK ME IN...

"...MORE ELEGANT THAN ANYTHING A KID FROM THE CIRCUS COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE... AND FILLED WITH VIBRANT LIFE... WITH PEOPLE WHO LOOKED AND SPOKE LIKE CHARACTERS FROM A BOOK...

"...OR MAYBE EVEN... FROM A DREAM."

AHEM...

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UH... ALFRED...

EVEN SPIES NEED THEIR REST, YOUNG MAN, PARTICULARLY ONE WISHING TO GROW UP TO BE AS BIG AND STRONG AS...

...MASTER BRUCE.

"UH, DICK?"

SORRY, BUT IT'S STRANGE, ISN'T IT, NOT HAVING ALFRED AROUND HERE?

AMEN- ESPECIALLY IN THE FACE OF THAT FUEL INTAKE YOU MENTIONED.

HEY, NO PROBLEM, KID-- FOLLOW ME.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU CAN ACTUALLY COOK...

I LIKE TO EAT.

SO DOES BRUCE--BUT HE HAD TO ORDER CHINESE LAST NIGHT.

THAT'S WHERE I'M ONE UP ON HIM--I'VE LIVED ON MY OWN WITHOUT AN ALFRED.

STILL MISS HIM, THOUGH...

HE WAS GOOD FOR A LOT MORE THAN COOKING AND CLEANING.

YEP-- BUT AT LEAST WE DON'T HAVE TO MISS HIM ON EMPTY STOMACHS.

A GENUINE *DISASTER*, COMMISSIONER GORDON, BUT IT'S FOR MUNICIPAL HEADACHES LIKE *THIS* THAT PUBLIC SERVANTS LIKE US GET *PAID*.

YES, MR. MAYOR.. BUT WHY DO YOU NEED *ME* HERE *NOW*?

IT'S CALLED "INSPECTING THE *DAMAGE*," GORDON-- "TOURING THE SCENE OF *TRAGEDY*."

IT'S ALSO CALLED A "PHOTO OPPORTUNITY."

DON'T GET *RIGHTEOUS*, GORDON, NOT WHEN IT WAS A *POLICE MATTER* WHICH *CREATED* THIS *MESS*, AND NOT WHEN IT TOOK THE *BATMAN* TO CLEAN IT *UP*.

YOUR *BATMAN-BOOSTING* IS ABOUT TO *DEFLATE*, MR MAYOR.

OH?

IT WAS *YOUR* "BATMAN" WHO CREATED THIS *MESS*, *NOT* THE POLICE-- AND *THE* BATMAN WHO CLEANED IT UP.

ARE YOU SUGGESTING THOSE RUMORS ABOUT *TWO* BATMEN ON THE BRIDGE ARE *TRUE*?

THERE'S ONLY *ONE* BATMAN, MAYOR KROL, AND THANK GOD HE'S *BACK*.

NOW, IF YOU'LL *EXCUSE* ME, I HAVE A *NEW* "MUNICIPAL HEADACHE" TO GET *PAID* FOR.

I THINK GORDON SPOILS DESSERT ON *PURPOSE.*

YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT-- IT NEVER FAILED WHEN I WAS ROBIN.

YOU GONNA TRY TO FOOL HIM WITH THE ROUGH AND SPOOKY *VOICE?*

JEAN PAUL VALLEY GOT AWAY WITH IT.

YEAH, FOR A *WHILE...*

"...BUT GORDON DOESN'T FOOL FOR *LONG.*"

NUMBER OF STRANGE *ATTACKS* OVER THE PAST MONTH, FOUR OF THEM *FATAL*, IN AND ALONG THE *RIVER.*

WHAT DO THE *SURVIVORS* DESCRIBE?

A *MONSTER.*

BUT SINCE THE ATTACKS WERE ALL *NOCTURNAL*--AND THE VICTIMS ALL WENT INTO *SHOCK*- WE CAN'T BE SURE *WHAT* THEY SAW...

HARBOR PATROL SPOTTED SOMETHING LARGE SWIMMING INTO THE RIVER. BUT IT SUBMERGED AND *DISAPPEARED.*

WE FIGURE SOME SORT OF *AQUATIC PREDATOR*, OUT OF ITS *NORMAL RANGE*--BUT THE ZOOLOGISTS WE CONSULTED CAN'T MATCH THE BITE-MARKS WITH *ANY* KNOWN ANIMAL.

Hnnh.

ANYTHING ELSE, COMMISSIONER?

JUST ONE THING.

WHICH ONE AM I TALKING TO TONIGHT?

GONE--AND SO MUCH FOR THE ROUGH AND SPOOKY VOICE.

COME ON.

WITH A TON OF LUCK, MAYBE I CAN AT LEAST FOOL--

"--THE BATS IN THE CAVE."

GORDON'S CONSULTANTS WERE RIGHT.

ANIMAL DENTITION, ALL RIGHT, BUT THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF THE BITE IS--

HUMAN, DICK--OR AS CLOSE TO HUMAN AS WAYLON JONES GETS!

AND WAYLON JONES IS--

KILLER CROC--BUSTED OUT OF ARKHAM ALONG WITH ALL THE OTHERS BY BANE...

"I GOT TRAPPED BETWEEN THE *TWO* OF THEM IN A *SEWER CHAMBER.*

"WHEN THE CAUSEWAY WE WERE ON *COLLAPSED*--

"--I MANAGED TO *STOP* MYSELF--

"--BUT *BANE* AND *CROC* WERE SWEPT INTO THE *TUNNEL*, STILL TRYING TO TEAR EACH OTHER *APART.*

"THEY MUST HAVE BEEN WASHED ALL THE WAY OUT TO *GOTHAM HARBOR...*"

BANE SHOWED UP AGAIN, OF COURSE, BUT THAT WAS THE LAST WE SAW OF *CROC.*

I EVEN THOUGHT HE MIGHT HAVE *DROWNED...*

NO SUCH LUCK-- HE JUST GOT *HUNGRY.*

AND IT'S TIME TO GO SEE HIM *NOW--*

"--ON THE *RIVER.*"

WHATTA WE GOT *TONIGHT,* SAL?

SHIPMENT'A *GUNS*--DUE IN ABOUT AN *HOUR.*

WE'RE SMUGGLIN' *GUNS* NOW?

AUTOMATIC ASSAULT PIECES--GONNA SELL 'EM TO THE *JAMAICAN GANGBANGERS...*

...MAKE UP FOR SOME OF THE *DOPE PROFITS* THEY HORNED IN ON AND--

FWSH

HEY, WHAT WAS *THAT--?*

BOO!

WH-*WHAT* THE--?!

S-SOME KIND OF M-MONSTER--?!

SHRRRUPT

YOU! WHO'S YOUR BOSS NOW? GERSHON? PARETTI..?

P-P-PARETTI...

C-C-CROC?

CALL HIM.. TELL HIM CROC'S BACK.

FROM THE DAYS WHEN THE SQUID WAS RUNNING THINGS.

PLUSHHH

HE'LL KNOW.

WE'RE GONNA "DROP CRIME IN ITS TRACKS"~BY STEALING A BOAT?

NOT QUITE STEALING, ROBIN.

MORE LIKE..

KLIK

VRUMVRUM

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WAYNETECH ENTERPRISES MARINE DIVISION

~BORROWING ONE OF DAD'S TOYS.

TOY'S GOT MUSCLES.

THAT'S OUR DAD.

SKRAATCH

WHAT'D PARETTI SAY?

H-HE...HE'S COMIN' RIGHT DOWN... P-PERSONALLY...

GOOD.

THEN I DON'T NEED YOU ANYMORE.

WH-WHAT ARE YOU...?

YOU SLURRED ME... CALLED ME A MONSTER...

ALL MY LIFE PEOPLE BEEN DOING THAT...PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY'RE PRETTY.

BUT YOU AIN'T PRETTY... AND I'M NOT A MONSTER.

THE NAME IS CROC...

...KILLER CROC.

YEEAHRR

REMEMBER WHEN I CAME TO NEW YORK AND ASKED FOR YOUR HELP?

AGAINST BRACUDA AND CHULO- TWO BRUTES HARD TO FORGET.

"WE WORKED WELL AS A TEAM, DICK, AND WHEN I WENT BACK TO GOTHAM AND BATMAN-- JEAN PAUL...

"...I LIKED THE SOUND OF NIGHTWING AND ROBIN A WHOLE LOT BETTER THAN BATMAN AND ROBIN."

WHICH ONLY PROVES THE MAXIM... BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR.

BUT, FUNNY THING... AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS PLAYING ROBIN TO BRUCE'S BATMAN, IT WASN'T BAD HAVING A ROBIN AT MY SIDE.

AND NOW, HERE WE BOTH ARE--TWO ROBINS PLAYING BATMAN AND ROBIN.

LET'S JUST HOPE WE'RE BOTH READY FOR IT.

"HEY, IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT YOUR EARLY RUN-IN WITH TWO-FACE, DICK..."

...I WON'T MAKE THAT KIND OF MISTAKE.

GOOD TO KNOW, BUT IT'S NOT YOU I'M WORRIED ABOUT. A MAN DIED BACK THEN BECAUSE I WASN'T READY TO BE ROBIN.

IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT.

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MAYBE NOT, BUT SINCE IT TOOK THE BATMAN TO *SAVE MY HASH*... I'VE *GOT* TO WONDER...

...AM I READY TO BE *HIM*?

HEY, WAIT A MINUTE...KINDA *LATE* FOR A *SHIPMENT DELIVERY*, ISN'T IT?

YO, *SAL~FRANK!* WHERE *ARE* YA? THESE CRATES ARE *HEAVY*...

SO *BREAK YOUR BACK.*

WHAT THE-?

K-TUMP

DEATH.

AAIEEE-

THAT'S ENOUGH, CROC!

YOU! WHERE'S BANE?

HE BROKE MY ARMS-TWICE-HAD TO SET THE BONE MYSELF THE SECOND TIME!

IT HURT--AND HE'S GONNA PAY!

WHERE IS HE?

PLOOSH

IN BLACKGATE PRISON.

HE WAS DROPPED-- BY YOU?

BY,,, YES, BY THE BATMAN.

BAD MOVE--CUZ NOW YOU'VE GOTTA STAND IN FOR HIM...

AND BESIDES, YOU AND ME GOT EVEN OLDER SCORES TO SETTLE--UNLESS YOU'VE FORGOTTEN THE TIMES WE TANGLED...?

HOW COULD I?

FWAP

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SPUNCH

SWUT

YOU'LL HAVETA DO BETTER THAN THAT...

...I BEEN HIT BY BANE.

RUUAHHH

FNK FNK FNK

SNK

SHUMPT

KRATCH

HREHRRR

TOUGH HIDE...

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WE GO IN *FAST.*

WHAT ABOUT *SAL AND FRANK*, MR. PARETTI?

THEY'RE EITHER *DEAD*—OR *EXPENDABLE.*

ROBIN--WATCH OUT!

SKRASH

CHUPT

BLAAST

TERRIFIC.

BRAKAKAKAK

ROBIN!

DON'T WORRY ABOUT *ME!* JUST TAKE CARE OF *CROC!*

USED TO WRESTLE GATORS IN THE FREAK SHOW! HOW 'BOUT IT, BATMAN--?

AHNFF!

YOU GOT RIBS STRONG AS A GATOR'S?

FORGET THE KID!

THERE-- ON THE BOAT!

SKANG

TAKT

SQUEEZE... YOU... DRY!

WHAT'RE YA WAITIN' FOR? BLAST 'EM BOTH!

KUP

TUP

AHRRR!

NO!

WUMPT

HWUKK

TUMPT

VRAKT

ROBIN! THE OTHER ONE!

TAK

SHWAK

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BRAKAKAK

HWOK

AKAKAKAKAKA

CALL THE POLICE, ROBIN--AND AN *AMBULANCE.*

EVEN *HIS* HIDE COULDN'T STOP THOSE *SLUGS.*

CONCERN FOR THE *BAD GUY...*

"...A HUGE *CHANGE* FROM SIDEKICKING FOR *JEAN PAUL.*"

POLICE HEADQUARTERS:

SO HE DID IT AGAIN--SOLVED THE *RIVER SLAYINGS*?

YES... BUT MAYBE YOU'VE BEEN *RIGHT*, SARAH... ALL ALONG...

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G.C.P.D.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M *DEALING* WITH ANYMORE... A VIGILANTE MASQUERADING AS SOME *NOCTURNAL PREDATOR*...

IT'S NEVER BOTHERED YOU *BEFORE*.

YOU'RE WRONG, SARAH ...IT'S *ALWAYS* BOTHERED ME...

I GOT THROUGH IT BY *TRUSTING* HIM... BECAUSE OF WHO HE WAS AS A *MAN*.

BUT *NOW*...JUST WHEN I THOUGHT THAT MAN WAS FINALLY *BACK*...

"...THERE'S A *THIRD* ONE."

REAL TEAMWORK *AGAIN*--AND WAY TO GO, TRUSTING ME TO HANDLE THOSE SHOOTERS ON MY *OWN*.

MAYBE... BUT THOSE SLUGS CROC TOOK *COULD* HAVE FOUND *YOU*.

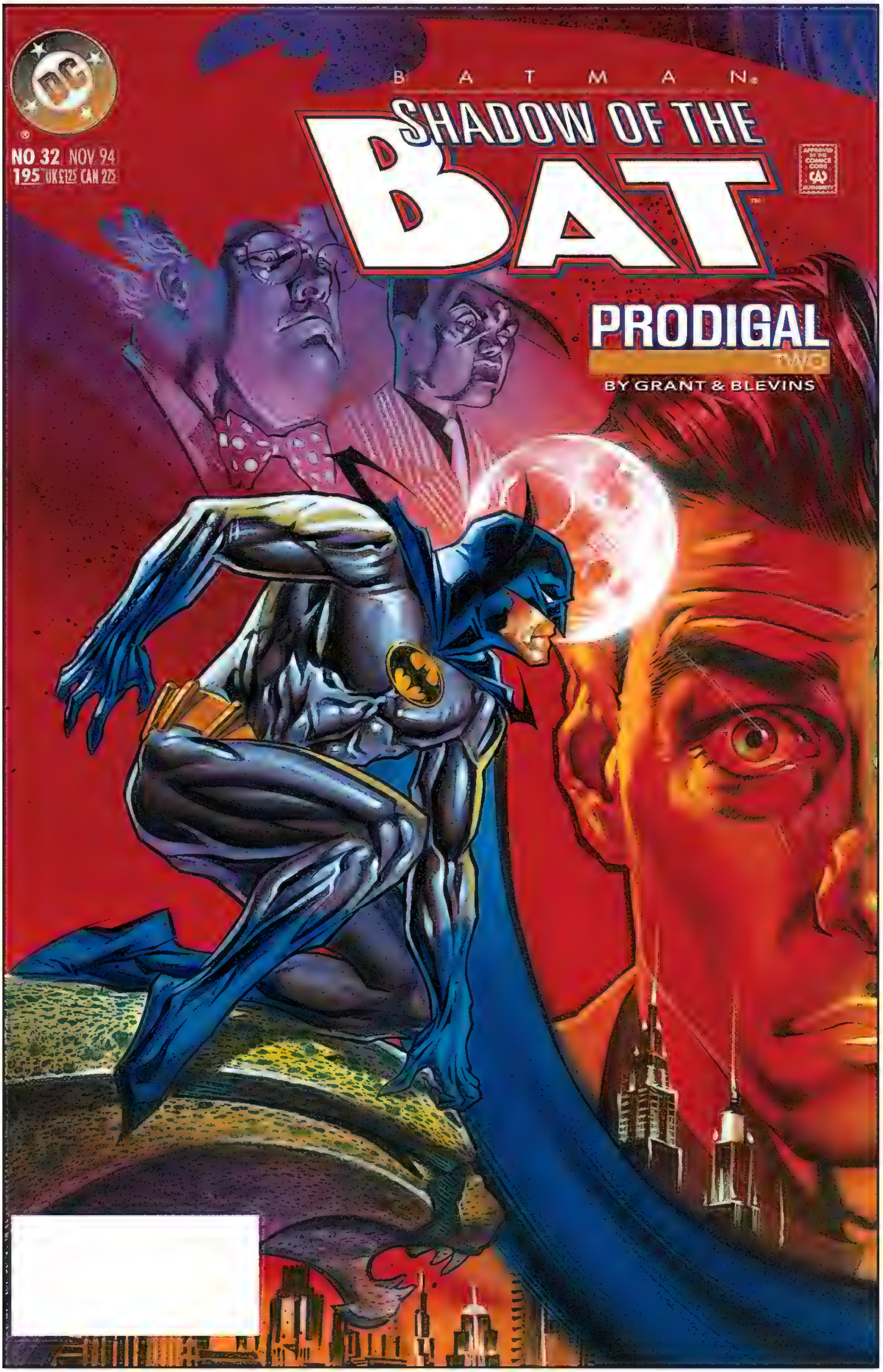
LIGHTEN *UP*--THEY *DIDN'T*.

IN *THIS* GAME, THERE'S ALWAYS A *NEXT* TIME... AND IF I BARELY CUT IT AS *ROBIN MYSELF*... AND DIDN'T DO MUCH BETTER AS *NIGHTWING*...

...WHAT AM I DOING *NOW*?

NEXT!
PRODIGAL PART II in SHADOW OF THE BAT #32: THE VENTRILOQUIST.

Cover art by **BRIAN STELFREEZE**



GOTHAM CITY. EVEN AT NOON, THE BACK STREETS ARE SWATHED IN SHADOW AND A CHILL WIND BLOWS...

NO TRICKS AN' YA WON'T GET HURT!

ONLY JOKIN'!

BLAM!

BLAM!

MAN WANTS TO SEE YA, BOBBY!

GEDDIN!

YOU'RE MAKING A BIG MISTAKE, GUYS. MR. VETCH IS NOT GOING TO LIKE THIS!

DEN MR. VETCH IS JUST GONNA HAVETA LUMP IT, GOGGY!

THE VENTRILOQUIST!

HEY, WHAT IS DIS? HAS HE SUDDENLY GOT STAR GILLIN' OR SOMETHIN'?

TALK TA ME, GOGGY! I'M DA GOSS'A DIS GANG!

I'VE NOTHING TO SAY TO YOU, SCARFACE. YOU OBVIOUSLY KNOW WHAT I'M CARRYING -- SO YOU ALSO KNOW MR. VETCH'LL STRING YOU UP FOR STOPPING ME!

LET ME WORRY AGOUT VETCH! ALL WE WANT FROM YOU IS DA MEETING PLACE WHERE YA HAND YER GOODIES OVER.

PUT YOU IN TOUCH WITH OUR DEALERS? NEVER!

NEVER SAY "NEVER," GOGGY!

TELL YA WHAT--I'LL MAKE A LITTLE GET WITCHA. I GET YA A GRIEFCASE FULLA SMACK YA'VE TOLD ME EVERYTHIN' I WANNA KNOW GEFORE VETCH EVEN KNOWS YER MISSIN'!

YOU'RE CRAZY!

CALL ME AMGITIOUS, YEAH. DEDICATED--HARD-WORKIN'--DA LITTLE GUY WITH AN EYE FER DA MAIN CHANCE!

GUT NOT CRAZY, GOGGY! NOT CRAZY!

RHINO--DA CORKSCREW!

HARVEY DENT-- A.K.A. TWO-FACE!

ON YOUR FEET! YOU'RE DUE IN COURT FOR THE RESULTS OF YOUR PSYCHIATRIC EVALUATION.

DO YOU HEAR ME, DENT?

STAND UP!

SURE.

I WISH THEY'D GET THIS CITY COMPUTERIZED! I'M DROWNING IN PAPERWORK! THIRTY MEN ON COURT TRANSFER--AND REGULATIONS STIPULATE A DOZEN, TOPS!

SOONER THEY GET ARKHAM REBUILT, THE BETTER. CONS AND KOOKS JUST DON'T MIX!

WHOLE DAMN JUSTICE SYSTEM'S STARTING TO COME APART AT THE SEAMS!

--OFF SCHOOL EARLY, *DICK*. I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU COULD SHOW ME SOME OF YOUR SPECIAL MARTIAL ARTS MOVES.

NOT TODAY, *TIM*. TOO MUCH TO DO.

HMM. WHERE'S *ALFRED* NOW THAT YOU NEED HIM?

I'LL GET BY.

I *DO* WONDER WHERE HE IS, THOUGH. ROUND-THE-WORLD *CRUISE*, MAYBE? HE MUST HAVE *MAJOR* SAVINGS FROM WHAT BRUCE PAID HIM!

AND NOW WITH *BRUCE* GONE, TOO ... FEELS KIND OF WEIRD. SO MANY CHANGES! DO YOU THINK THAT--

BRUCE TOLD ME A *STORY* ONCE: TWO PHILOSOPHERS TALKED ALL DAY.

AND...?

THE *MESS* WAS STILL THERE *NEXT* MORNING!

MESSAGE RECEIVED AND UNDERSTOOD, CAPTAIN!

I DON'T LIKE THIS, SCARFACE! **TORTURE** AND **VIOLENCE** MAKE ME FEEL **SICK!**

HA! GEATS ME WHY I GO ON WORKIN' WIT' YA, YA SQUEAMISH GAG O' WIND!

LOOK AT DA WAY YA **FOULED UP** WHEN YA GROKE OUTA ARKHAM! PLAYIN' WITH **DUCKS** AN **MISTER** STINKIN' **SOCKO,** LETTIN' VETCH **TAKE OVER** OUR GUSINESS!

GOGGY WAS **RIGHT**-- EXCEPT IT AIN'T **ME** DAT'S CRAZY, IT'S **YOU!**

IN CASE YA FORGOT, VETCH AIN'T EXACTLY KEEN TA HAND **GACK** WHAT HE TOOK. DA GUY'S GOT A HARD LESSON TA LEARN!

YES, BUT I DON'T SEE HOW **CAPTURING** HIS **DISTRI-BUTOR,** CUTTING HIS **HEROIN** WITH **STRYCHNINE** AND HAVING THE **BULLET BOYS** DELIVER IT TO THE **DEALERS** IS GOING TO **HELP** US!

WELL, IT SURE AIN'T GONNA DO **VETCH'S** REP NO GOOD!

--STAY AND HELP US OUT? WE'RE RUNNING SHORT-STAFFED!

UNION WOULD NEVER ALLOW IT.

THEY'RE ALL *YOURS*, FRIEND --AND GOOD LUCK WITH 'EM!

ABBIN, LEO-- COURT THREE!

MARRIOTT, DAVID--COURT ONE! YOUR LAWYER'S WAITING.

KENT, HARVEY--!

KENT! *HARVEY KENT!*

I'M HARVEY KENT.

YOU *DEAF?* SIGN THERE AND THERE.

THE *CHECK KITING* CHARGES AGAINST YOU HAVE BEEN *DROPPED.* LACK OF EVIDENCE. YOU'RE *WALKING.*

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW LUCKY YOU *ARE*, KENT!

I DID A LOTTA THINKIN' WHEN I WAS LYIN' IN DA COPS' PROPERTY OFFICE. DIS IS DA NINETIES. SENTIMENT IS *OUT*. WE GOTTA GO STRAIGHT FER DA *JUGULAR!*

RIGHT AGOUT NOW, *SMACKHEADS* ALL OVER DIS CITY ARE FIXIN' FER DA DAY'S FIRST *HIT*--

"ONLY, INSTEADA DA *HEAVEN* DEY'RE EXPECTIN'--

"DEY'LL FIND DEY GOUGHT DEMSELVES A ONE-WAY TICKET TA *HELL!*"

ISN'T THAT FOULING OUR *OWN* NEST? I MEAN, IF WE'RE GOING BACK INTO BUSINESS...?

DIS CITY *MANUFACTURES* JUNKIES! DERE'LL GE PLENTY OTHERS TA GUY OUR STUFF!

AN' AS FOR VETCH--I GOT *PLANS* FER DAT GUY.

CORKSCREW PLANS! HAHAHAHAHA!

"YOU'RE INCORRIGIBLE, SCARFACE! DOESN'T HUMAN LIFE MEAN *ANYTHING* TO YOU?"

"SURE. IT'S A *GUCK*, AIN'T IT?"

ALMOST JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS...!

FEELS LIKE THAT FOR ME, TOO--ONLY, THE OTHER WAY ROUND, IF THAT MAKES SENSE.

SO MANY NIGHTS BRUCE AND I CAME DOWN THESE STAIRS TOGETHER--

--AND ***BATMAN*** AND ***ROBIN*** EMERGED AT THE BOTTOM.

HARD TO BELIEVE THAT ***I*** ONCE WORE THE ROBIN COSTUME... EVEN ***HARDER*** TO BELIEVE ***I'M*** THE BATMAN NOW!

BEST CHECK OUT THE CITY BEFORE WE TACKLE THE NIGHT!

GOTHAM 5

--THIRTEEN ADDICTS DEAD, AT LEAST TWENTY TAKEN TO ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL AS THE RESULT OF A SUSPECTED BATCH OF ***CONTAMINATED HEROIN!***

INTERESTING. ST. JOHN'S SERVES THE ***WHARFDALE*** AREA. THAT'S BEEN ***MARTY VETCH'S*** TURF FOR A YEAR OR SO.

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VETCH IS A CLEVER GUY-- CLEVER ENOUGH TO HAVE A CLEAN SHEET. HE SELLS GOOD STUFF TO REPEAT CUSTOMERS WITH NO FUSS.

SO WHY WOULD HE SUDDENLY DUMP *POISON* ON THEM?

VETCH, M

MAYBE *HE* DIDN'T.

QUESTION: WHO *ELSE* MIGHT HAVE? WHAT KIND OF MIND IS *DEPRAVED* ENOUGH TO *MURDER* PEOPLE WHO'RE KILLING THEMSELVES ANYWAY?

LET'S ASK THE COMPUTER...

A *VENTRILOQUIST* AND HIS *DUMMY*?

I'VE OBVIOUSLY BEEN OUT OF GOTHAM TOO LONG!

THIS VENTRILOQUIST CONTROLLED WHARFDALE BEFORE VETCH DID. HE'S STILL ON THE RUN FROM ARKHAM. COULD BE HE WANTS HIS TURF BACK.

WELL, WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!

YEAH. *JUST* LIKE THE OLD DAYS!

--AT LEAST TWENTY--

--AND WE CAN COUNT ON THERE BEING *MORE*. DEALERS WHO'VE *PAID* FOR BAD HEROIN WON'T BE WILLING TO LOSE MONEY. THEY'LL JUST *CUT* IT AND PASS IT ON...!

MAYBE NOT SUCH A BAD THING, COMMISH. IT'S NOT EXACTLY *ENHANCEMENTS* TO THE CITY WE'RE LOSING!

THEY'RE *HUMAN BEINGS*, SERGEANT! IT'S NOT OUR PLACE TO *JUDGE* THEM. OUR JOB IS TO *SERVE* THEM... AND *PROTECT* THEM. WHICH WE'RE MANIFESTLY *NOT* DOING!

SORRY, COMMISH. FEEBLE JOKE!

HE LOOKS UP AT THE SKY, FOR A MOMENT ALMOST EXPECTANT. IT'S AT TIMES LIKE THIS HE USED TO ASK FOR HELP.

GOTHAM CITY POLICE

THE TRUST IT REQUIRED TO WORK WITH A VIGILANTE HAD BEEN BUILT UP OVER A LONG TIME. JIM GORDON COULD NEVER SEEK AID FROM SOMEONE HE DIDN'T KNOW.

AND HE NO LONGER KNOWS THE MAN IN THE COSTUME.

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THE BAT-SIGNAL IS OFF, AND THE NIGHT SKY SEEMS EMPTY WITHOUT IT.

SEE, YA REALLY OUGHTA HAVE CONSIDERED MY PARTNERSHIP OFFER MORE *SERIOUSLY*, MARTY. NOW THINGS IS GETTIN' *GLOODY!*

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! HOW COULD I GO INTO BUSINESS WITH A VENTRILOQUIST'S *DUMMY*? I'D BE THE LAUGHINGSTOCK OF GOTHAM!

YA THINK YA *AIN'T* NOW? YER DOPE IS *KILLIN'* YER CUSTOMERS AS FAST AS DEY CAN FIX IT!

I WANT TO SPEAK TO BOBBY!

NO PROGLEM, MARTY. WHAT SAY I GRING HIM ROUND AN' WE'LL STRAIGHTEN DIS WHOLE MATTER OUT?

EVEN GETTER-- WHY DON'T I *TREAT* YA TO A *NIGHT OUT*? COME TO DA CLUG AT EIGHT O'CLOCK!

CLUG? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

DA *VENTRILOQUIST CLUG*, YA MORON! MY *NIGHT CLUG!*

COME ALONE--AN' NO TRICKS, OR *GOGGY* GETS DA *CORKSCREW!*

I KNEW WE'D FACE THIS HASSLE ONE DAY! WELL, BETTER SOONER THAN LATER.

VITO-- YOU GUYS TAKE THE SERIOUS ARTILLERY AND HIT THIS NIGHTSPOT. I WANT THE VENTRILOQUIST *WASTED*--

"--AND THAT STINKIN' DUMMY GURNED--I MEAN *BURNED!*"

FILES SAID *ARNOLD WESKER*--ALIAS THE VENTRILOQUIST--IS A *PSYCHOPATH* SUFFERING FROM EXTREME *SCHIZOPHRENIA*.

SEEMS WESKER IS PLEASANT AND QUIET, BUT HE EXPRESSES THE *EVIL* SIDE OF HIS NATURE THROUGH HIS VENTRILOQUIST'S DUMMY *SCARFACE*.

I HAVEN'T COME UP AGAINST THEM MYSELF--BUT I HAVE TO ADMIT, IT'S HARD TO TAKE SUCH A COMBO *SERIOUSLY!*

AGREED. BUT REMEMBER--

--AT FIRST SIGHT, YOU MIGHT THINK *THE JOKER* WAS ONLY A *CLOWN!*

NO SIGN OF LIFE.

I SUPPOSE IT WAS A LONG SHOT WESKER WOULD BE HERE. HE'S AN ESCAPED PRISONER--UNLIKELY HE'D HIDEOUT IN THE FIRST PLACE ANYBODY WOULD THINK OF LOOKING.

SO... BACK TO RANDOM PATROL?

HOLD ON A MINUTE!

MORE COMPANY!

THEY'RE ARMED!

COULD BE A DRUG MEET--

IT'S A DOUBLE-CROSS! SCARFACE WAS RIGHT!

SCARFACE IS ALWAYS RIGHT!

'S ALL LOCKED UP!

THEY GOTTA BE INSIDE! WE SPLIT UP, HIT FRONT AN' BACK TOGETHER--

LOW

WHO--?

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IT'S A HIT!

GO FOR THE DRIVER!

SHFF

WUNK! SKASH!

THOUF!

WHAT IN THE NAME--?

GRENADES! RUN, YOU FOOLS!

ARGH!

AAH--!

BABAM!

STREEEE

KARA

TAKE COVER!

I'LL

HANDLE THESE

MURDERING RATS!

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CARNAGE!

I CALLED IT IN. AMBULANCES'LL BE HERE SOON!

I'M BEGINNING TO *LOATHE* THIS VENTRILO-QUIST--WITH A *VENGEANCE!*

WHERE DO WE FIND WESKER?

HE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS! WE WERE ACTING ALONE!

WOULD YOU RATHER I *MAKE* YOU TELL ME?

Y-YOU CAN'T! THAT AIN'T *LEGAL!*

RIGHT!

I'M A *VIGILANTE*. THAT MEANS I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT TO YOU.

YOU'VE GOT EXACTLY *FIVE* SECONDS TO START TALKING, SCUM!

"Y-YOU WIN! 1412 HOOPER STREET. HE'S GONE TO SEE VETCH!"

NICE BLUFF! JEAN PAUL WOULD HAVE JUST *BEATEN* IT OUT OF THEM!

THAT'S WHY HE LOST THE JOB!

SOMEBODY AT THE DOOR, MR. VETCH!

VITO AIN'T CALLED IN! CHECK IT!

YEAH? WHO'S THERE?

BAM BAM BAM!

LOOKS LIKE DA GAME'S CHANGED, HUH, MARTY?

Y-YOU CONVINCED ME, VENTRILOQUIST! WE'RE PARTNERS!

TALK TA *ME!* DA VENTRILOQUIST'S JUST A MEANS O' *PERAMGULATION!*

OKAY, SCARFACE! TAKE IT EASY, PARTNER.

DA DEAL'S OFF! YA GLEW YER CHANCE! I'M TAKIN' OVER YER CASH AN' YER STASH, LOCK, STOCK AN' GARREL! WHERE YA GOT IT HID?

HAND OVER TO YOU, JUST LIKE THAT? YOU MUST BE *JOKING!*

CLAMMIN' UP ON ME, HUH? I GOT MY *OWN* WAY O' OPENIN' CLAMS!

RHINO--DA *CORKSCREW!*

YER GONNA FIND OUT, MARTY-- I'M *GAD* TO DA *GONE! EVIL!*

BUT-- YOU'RE JUST A *DUMMY!*

NO ORDINARY DUMMY, SUCKER!

DEY MADE ME FROM DA *WOOD* O' DA *BLACKGATE GALLOWS!* DOZENS O' *KILLERS* AN' *ARSONISTS* AN' *MANIACS* AN *WORSE* DIED HANGIN' FROM ME -- *JERKIN'* AN' *SQUIRMIN'* AN *SCREAMIN'* AS THEIR *GLACK SOULS* WENT STRAIGHT TA *HELL.*

Q-QUIT IT, BOSS! YER *SPOOKIN'* ME!

SHUDDUP, YA GIG PALOOKA!

PLEASE, VENTRILOQUIST-- DON'T MAKE HIM DO THIS!

I'M SORRY, MARTY. *I'M* NOT IN CHARGE. IF IT WAS UP TO *ME,* I'D SET YOU FREE. I QUITE *LIKE* YOU.

BOSS! BATMAN AND ROBIN --HEADED THIS WAY!

YER LUCKY DIS TIME, MARTY--GUT I'LL GE GACK!

RHINO--WITH ME! YOU HOLD 'EM OFF, NATHAN!

BOSS! DON'T LEAVE ME--!

KRASH!

I'VE GOT HIM! STOP THE VENTRILOQUIST!

IT'S OVER, WESKER! I'M TAKING YOU IN!

PLEASE--NO VIOLENCE!

YA GIVE UP TOO EASY, YA GALDY LUG! THROW ME!

THROW ME!

SO LONG, GAT-GRAIN!

HAHAHAHA!

I GIVE UP! DON'T HIT ME! I'M NOT A PHYSICAL MAN!

BLAST!

WE'VE GOT THE MASTERMIND. THE DUMMY ISN'T GOING TO MATTER MUCH!

IT WASN'T ME. *SCARFACE* MADE ME DO IT. HE'S WICKED! *EVIL!*

THE NEW BATMAN SHOULD BE SATISFIED, BUT A FAINT DOUBT NAGS AT HIS MIND--

SOMETHING ABOUT *DOUBLE ACTS*. VENTRILOQUIST AND SCARFACE... BATMAN AND ROBIN. EACH NEEDS THE OTHER. THEY'RE NEVER THE SAME IF YOU SPLIT THEM UP.

ONCE, LONG AGO, THE BIGGEST DOUBLE ACT OF THEM ALL -- *TWO-FACE*--ALMOST COST HIM EVERYTHING.

HE SHIVERS, AND PUTS THE MEMORY FROM HIM AS THEY FADE INTO THE NIGHT.

IT'S OKAY, SCARFACE--I WON'T LET YOU DOWN!

THE VENTRILOQUIST GAVE ME STRICT INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT WHAT I WAS TA DO IF DIS SITUATION EVER AROSE!

'S PROBABLY *PASSPORTS* AN' EMERGENCY *CASH* AN' DETAILED PLANS FER RUNNIN' DA ORGANIZATION WHILE I FIGURE HOW TA BREAK HIM OUTA *JAIL!*

HUH? DERE'S NOTHIN' HERE-- JUST A *BOOK...!*

HOW TO THROW YOUR VOICE

S.H. LEWIS

JUSTICE IS SUCH A FRAGILE THING. MEN'S LIVES DEPENDENT ON MARKS ON PAPER. PULSES IN A COMPUTER...

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE PAPER *TEARS*? IF THE COMPUTERS *CRASH*?

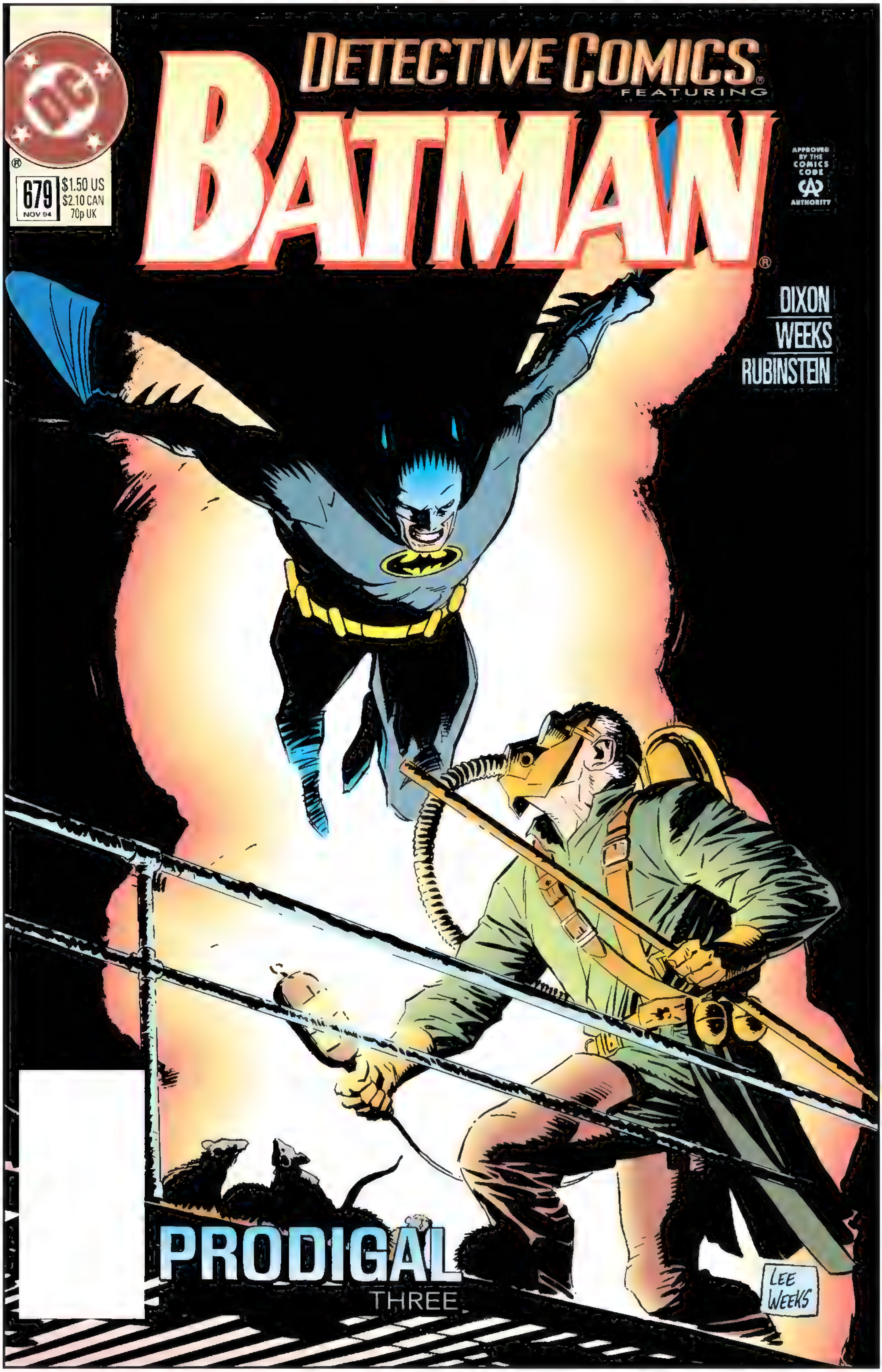
IT'S ALL INTERCONNECTED, EVERY ELEMENT DEPENDING ON EVERY OTHER TO KEEP A CITY RUNNING. HE COULD BRING IT *ALL* TUMBLING DOWN.

HE COULD MAKE GOTHAM A *PARADISE*... FOR CRIMINALS AND OUTLAWS.

THROUGH THE COIN, FATE HAS MADE HER DECISION. *ANARCHY!*

SO SHALL IT BE.

Cover art by **BRIAN STELFREEZE**



THE WHEELS OF JUSTICE GRIND SLOW BUT FINE IN GOTHAM.

AND IN A CITY UNDER SIEGE BY CRIME THEY GRIND LOWS INTO THE NIGHT.

The VERMIN Factor

OTIS FLANNEGAN? YOU ARE PRESENT AND PREPARED FOR YOUR PAROLE HEARING?

READY AS I'LL *EVER* BE, YOUR HONOR.

CHUCK DIXON • *writer* • LEE WEEKS • *guest penciller* • JOE RUBINSTEIN • *guest inker* • ADRIENNE ROY • *colorist* • JOHN COSTANZA • *letterer* • DARREN VINCENZO • *associate editor*

SCOTT PETERSON, *editor* • BATMAN *created by* BOB KANE

AS YOU CAN SEE WE HAVE A FULL DOCKET. WE WON'T WASTE ANY MORE OF YOUR TIME THAN WE HAVE TO, MR. FLANNEGAN.

I HAVE *PLENTY* OF TIME, SIR.

EXACTLY.

YOU ARE SERVING A TWENTY-YEAR SENTENCE FOR ABDUCTION, AGGRAVATED ASSAULT, SECOND DEGREE MURDER AND DESTRUCTION OF PUBLIC PROPERTY.

FRANKLY, NOTHING IN YOUR RECORDS BEFORE OR SINCE YOUR CONVICTION RECOMMENDS YOU FOR EARLY RELEASE.

HAVE YOU *ANY*THING TO SAY, OTIS? HAVE YOU DONE ANYTHING WITH YOUR TIME IN PRISON THAT WOULD HELP YOUR CASE?

WELL, I'VE BEEN DOING SOME *WOOD*-CARVING.

MADE THIS LITTLE *FLUTE* HERE. PITCHED IT *JUST* RIGHT.

HIGH PITCHED--

--LIKE A DRILL THROUGH MY SKULL--

CAN *FEEL* IT *MORE* THAN-- HEAR IT--

YOU'RE NOT *SUPPOSED* TO HEAR THE MUSIC...

...IT'S FOR THEM!

SOUNDS LIKE YOUR GUESS WAS ON THE MONEY.

NOT MUCH OF A GUESS AFTER READING *RATCATCHER'S* FILE. HE WAS *BOUND* TO TRY SOMETHING HIS FIRST TIME OUT OF BLACKGATE.

EEEEEEEEE

IF I 'VE LEARNED ANYTHING FROM MY LITTLE FRIENDS IT'S ABOUT *SURVIVAL.*

A RAT WILL DO *ANY*THING TO SURVIVE... *ANY*THING TO BE...

FREE!

GIVE IT UP, FLANNEGAN. YOU CAN'T GET FAR IN THOSE MANACLES.

AND THEY CALL *ME* DANGEROUS!

AT LEAST I NEVER *DRESSED* LIKE A RAT!

DON'T RUN, RATCATCHER! IT'S FIVE STORIES TO THE STREET.

I'M *NOT* RUNNING. I'VE NO REASON AT *ALL* TO HURRY. I'LL JUST WHISTLE A LITTLE TUNE.

YUCK!

DON'T MOVE, ROBIN. A LOT OF THEM MIGHT BE RABID. DON'T DO ANYTHING TO MAKE THEM *BITE*.

WE CAN'T JUST LET HIM GET AWAY!

ROBIN! STOP!

OOP!

BONEHEAD PLAY, BOY WONDER.

SORRY. I FORGOT I WAS OUT WITH "MR. PERFECT."

RATCATCHER?

GONE. AND ALL HIS FURRY LITTLE FRIENDS *WITH* HIM.

LIKE I SAID, IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TRYING TO STAY A STEP *AHEAD* FOR ONCE.

WAS A GOOD IDEA. WELL, BACK TO SQUARE ONE.

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"SINCE NEITHER ONE OF US HAS ANY FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE WITH THE RATCATCHER, SEE WHAT YOU CAN DIG UP ON HIS PAST CRIMES."

ANOTHER DISGRUNTLED CIVIL SERVANT. FLANNEGAN LOST HIS JOB AS RATCATCHER WHEN HE KILLED A MAN IN A BARROOM BRAWL.

KEPT THE JUDGE AND TWO OTHERS WHO HELPED CONVICT HIM IN CELLS IN THE SEWERS FOR FIVE YEARS. TRAINED RATS TO KILL.

I'LL RUN A MATCH/ SEARCH FOR UNUSUAL EVENTS IN THE POLICE DATABASE.

REPORTS OF A VIGILANTE WORKING IN CHELSEA. NOBODY I KNOW.

WHOA. THAT *CAN'T* BE RIGHT.

FILE ED3M

SUBJECT: HARVEY DENT

HARVEY DENT WAS PUT ON EARLY RELEASE?

NO *WAY* TWO-FACE'S SENTENCE IS UP. THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A *MAJOR* SCREW-UP.

HE'S BEEN ON THE STREET FOR CLOSE TO FORTY-EIGHT HOURS.

MODEM THIS OVER TO THE CAVE. DICK SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS *NOW*.

TIM!

YOU *SURPRISED* ME, DAD.

NO WONDER, WITH YOUR EYES GLUED TO THAT MONITOR LIKE THAT.

HOW ABOUT A NIGHT OUT IN THE *REAL* WORLD?

UH...

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DON'T TELL ME YOU HAVE PLANS. IT'S A *SCHOOL* NIGHT.

I HAVE TICKETS TO THE TENNIS OPEN AT THE ARENA. I HEARD THERE'S A FEW HOT MATCHES GOING.

OH NO.

THANKS, DAD.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO *DO*, DICK. MY DAD'S NOT GIVING ME A SECOND TO *MYSELF* AND *NO* TIME FOR ROBIN.

THE RATCATCHER'S ON THE LOOSE AGAIN AND NOW *HARVEY DENT*.

TWO-FACE, HUH?

TWO-FACE HASN'T BEEN *OUT* LONG ENOUGH TO HAVE *COME UP* WITH ONE OF HIS GOOFY SCHEMES.

RATCATCHER'S OUR MAIN CONCERN. I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO HUNTING FOR HIM THROUGH THE SEWERS.

WE SPENT MORE THAN ENOUGH TIME DOWN THERE LOOKING FOR KILLER CROC.

YOU SURE THAT'S WHERE FLANNEGAN WILL HEAD?

NEER!

THEY'RE NOT PETS, HAROLD.

THEY'RE SMALL BUT TOUGH.

THEY CAN SURVIVE BEING FLUSHED DOWN A TOILET OR A TWENTY-STORY FALL.

SICK AS IT SOUNDS, THE SEWERS ARE RATCATCHER'S HOME.

THERE'S CLOSE TO THREE HUNDRED MILES OF DRAINS AND AQUEDUCTS AND STEAM TUNNELS UNDER THE STREETS.

YOU THINK THESE GUYS WILL TELL YOU SOMETHING?

WHEREVER FLANNEGAN IS THERE'LL BE LOTS OF RATS.

THE ONLY FRIENDS HE HAS.

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PRETTY SAD. THE GUY SPENDS ALL HIS TIME UNDER THE GROUND WITH A BUNCH OF RODENTS FOR COMPANY.

YEAH?

I'M GLAD I DON'T KNOW ANYONE LIKE THAT, BATMAN.

YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS, TIMBO. YOU'LL MISS OUT ON CRAWLING THROUGH STORM DRAINS.

YOU GET TO HAVE ALL THE FUN UNTIL THE TENNIS OPEN IS OVER. MY DAD PICKED A LOUSY TIME TO REESTABLISH OUR RELATIONSHIP.

BE THANKFUL YOU HAVE THOSE KINDS OF PROBLEMS, TIM. YOU ALMOST LOST YOUR DAD TWICE.

OH, I KNOW THAT, BUT...

I JUST FELT THINGS WERE GOING TO GET BACK TO NORMAL.

"NORMAL" IS NOT A WORD I HEAR AROUND HERE MUCH.

YEAH. I JUST MISS ALFRED. HE ALWAYS KNOWS WHAT TO SAY.

I CAN HEAR HIM NOW...

"...WELL, LIFE'S FULL OF LITTLE SURPRISES, MASTER TIM."

OH. IT'S YOU.

YOU HAVE SOME *QUESTIONS* FOR ME?

NONE THAT *BOTHERED* ME UNTIL NOW. HOW MANY BATMEN *ARE* THERE?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, COMMISSIONER.

I'M A *COP*, FOR GOD'S SAKE. DID YOU REALLY THINK YOU COULD *FOOL* ME FOREVER?

THE PUT-ON VOICE IS A LITTLE DIFFERENT. YOUR FRAME ISN'T QUITE AS LARGE. *YOU'RE* SEVERAL INCHES SHORTER.

DOES IT MATTER?

HELL *YES*, IT *DOES*!

I'VE PUT MY LIFE AND MY REPUTATION ON THE LINE FOR YOU A *HUNDRED* TIMES. AND ALL THAT TIME I THOUGHT IT WAS FOR THE *SAME* MAN.

AT LEAST THERE'S *THAT*.

THE OTHER ONE; THE *ARMORED* ONE... HE'S GONE FOR GOOD?

YES.

WELL, THIS ISN'T A *SOCIAL* VISIT. WHAT CAN I HELP YOU WITH?

HARVEY DENT. YOU *ARE* AWARE HE WAS ALLOWED TO ESCAPE.

SOME ESCAPE. HE *WALKED* OUT THE BACK GATE. A *CLERICAL* ERROR.

ANY WORD ON HIS NEXT MOVE OR CURRENT WHEREABOUTS?

WHO KNOWS WHAT'S IN THAT DISEASED MIND OF HIS? EVERY UNIT IS KEEPING AN EYE OUT FOR HIM AND HIS KNOWN ASSOCIATES.

I'LL DO WHAT I CAN.

WELL, HERE'S THE PART WHERE I LOOK AWAY AND YOU SLIP OUT THE WINDOW AND LEAVE ME TALKING TO MYSELF.

I'LL MAKE IT *EASY* FOR YOU THIS TIME.

NOTHING *HAS* TO CHANGE, COMMIS-SIONER.

EVERYTHING CHANGES.

EVERYTHING.

AW NO! NO!

WITH BROKEN LEGS I COULD RUN FASTER!

MY ALIBI

MY MUTHAH COULDA RUN THAT PLAY. THE KNIGHTS 'RE LAME THIS SEASON.

YOU HAVE MONEY ON THEM, CLARKIE?

AN' EIGHT POINTS.

JIMMY, GIVE ME A SCOTCH ROCKS AND--

YO. YER ON MY STOOL, PALLY. YOU BETTER MOVE YER--

YOU WANT THE SAME AGAIN?

YEAH...

THIS TIME MAKE IT A DOUBLE.

IT'S A FUNNY WORLD, AIN'T IT?

USED TO BE MY JOB TO KILL YOU ALL, MY RATTIES.

THE CITY HIRED ME TO KEEP YOUR POPULATIONS DOWN. TO HUNT YOU AND POISON YOU AND EXTERMINATE YOU.

NOW WE'RE ALL BUDDIES. SPECIAL FRIENDS.

I'VE LEARNED TO ADMIRE YOU.

THERE'S SO MUCH TO LEARN FROM YOU.

THE POWER OF NUMBERS.

BUT YOU ARE *HATED* AND *SHUNNED* AND *MALIGNED.*

WE HAVE *SO* MUCH IN COMMON. I WAS LOYAL TO THE CITY. I WORKED HARD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOTHAM.

AND THEY REPAID ME WITH *PRISON!*

THAT MAN *DESERVED* TO DIE. HE WAS A *BULLY* AND A *DRUNK*. I STABBED HIM AND I WOULD STAB HIM *AGAIN.*

SO MISUNDERSTOOD. SO LONELY. HOW CAN THE CITY *TREAT* US LIKE THIS?

WELL, NO *MORE!*

WE'LL *SHOW* THEM THEY'RE WRONG TO ABUSE US.

WE'LL BRING THEM TO THEIR *KNEES!*

A LEGION! AN ARMY! FOLLOW ME, TROOPS!

GENERAL RATCATCHER LEADS YOU TO YOUR GLORIOUS REWARD!

ALL OF GOTHAM IS OURS!

I CAN SEE NOW WHY BRUCE KEPT HAROLD AROUND.

THIS SUBWAY ROCKET IS *WILD.*

JUST THE TICKET FOR EXPLORING GOTHAM UNDER-GROUND. *AND* I DON'T HAVE TO DRIVE IN THE RAIN.

FLANNEGAN'S NOT WASTING ANY *TIME.*

HIS LITTLE PALS ARE ON THE *MOVE*. THE TUNNEL'S *ALIVE* WITH THEM.

HE'S GOT *SOMETHING* IN MIND.

DO YOU SEE, MY RATTIES?

THE STORM DRAINS FEED INTO HERE AND OUT TO GOTHAM HARBOR.

BUT THE BODIES OF *MILLIONS* OF YOU CAN BLOCK THE MAIN AQUEDUCT. THE CITY'S PUMP WILL BE OVERFLOWED.

THE SUBWAYS WILL FLOOD. THE COMMUTER TUNNELS WILL BE INUNDATED.

MANY OF YOU WILL DROWN. BUT A NEW GENERATION WILL BE BORN IN MERE *WEEKS!*

BREED AND *SURVIVE!* BREED AND *CONQUER!*

UH?

I CALL HIM *RADIO RAT.*

WHO?

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AND YOU CALLED HIM RIGHT TO YOU, FLANNEGAN.

SIX RATS IN THE SYSTEM WITH RADIO TRANSMITTERS.

UNH!

ONE OF THEM *HAD* TO FIND YOU.

UFF!

YOUR LITTLE FLUTE *CALLS* THEM.

THIS SOUND AMPLIFIER IS CALIBRATED TO DRIVE THEM *AWAY.*

NO!

I DIDN'T GATHER THEM FOR YOU TO CAUSE THEM *PAIN!*

A LITTLE *SITUATIONAL* ETHICS, RAT-HUGGER?

UK!

YOU BROUGHT THEM HERE TO **DIE!**

AGHH!

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IF THIS WORKS IT SHOULD BE LIKE FINGERNAILS ON A BLACKBOARD TO THESE RATS.

OR AT LEAST YOKO ONO'S SINGING.

EEEE

Cover art by TOM GRUMMETT and RAY KRYSSING

TWO IN EVERY CROWD

OH NO...

I'VE DONE IT AGAIN.

CHUCK DIXON
STORY
PHIL JIMENEZ
PENCILS
RAY KRYSSING
INKS
ADRIENNE ROY
COLORS
ALBERT DE GUZMAN
LETTERS
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL
ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNY O'NEIL
EDITOR

I WENT TO SCHOOL IN MY ROBIN COSTUME.

THIS HAS BEEN HAPPENING WAY TOO MUCH LATELY.

BIOLOGY

GOTHAM KNIGHTS

ALGEBRA

WORLD CULTURES

GAAAAAH!

MOST PEOPLE HAVE NIGHTMARES ABOUT GOING OUT IN PUBLIC NAKED.

NOT ME.

OR MAYBE THE ONE WHERE YOU SIT DOWN TO TAKE A TEST AND CAN'T REMEMBER ANY OF THE ANSWERS.

I'D TRADE FOR THAT ONE IN A GOTHAM MINUTE.

I'D LIKE TO THINK IT WAS THE PIZZA I HAD LAST NIGHT.

BUT I KNOW BETTER.

IT'S THE WEIGHT OF ALL MY SECRETS.

TIM! GLAD TO SEE YOU UP SO BRIGHT AND EARLY!

THE LAKE'S STILL GOT A MIST ON IT AND THE FISHIES ARE BITING!

LET'S PULL IN A FEW BEFORE YOU HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL!

GIVE ME A MINUTE, DAD.

DON'T TAKE TOO LONG!

WE DID THE FATHER/SON THING ALL WEEK AT THE TENNIS OPEN.

NOW IT'S FISHING?

LATE NIGHT CRIMEBUSTING AND PRE-DAWN FISHING EXPEDITIONS DO NOT A HAPPY TIMMY MAKE.

ALL THOSE YEARS I WANTED DAD AND ME TO DO THINGS TOGETHER.

I GUESS THAT'S WHY I BECAME ROBIN.

SOMETHING TO DO WHILE MOM AND DAD WERE TROTTING THE GLOBE DIGGING UP ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS.

SOMETHING TO FILL THE EMPTY PLACE IN MY LIFE.

...THE LITTLE PUNK...

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...I'M GOING TO CATCH UP WITH HIM AND BLOW HIM IN TWO!

YOU GOT A HELLUVA MAD ON FOR THE KID, TWO-FACE.

I HATE HIM SO MUCH I'M BESIDE MYSELF!

EAT SLUGS, YOU HALF-PINT!

I FEEL A LITTLE BETTER. THIS HAS BEEN THERAPEUTIC FOR ME.

I THOUGHT IT WAS BATMAN YOU HATED SO MUCH.

SO DID I. BUT NOW I KNOW BETTER, RALPHIE.

THE SHRINKS IN PRISON SHOWED ME THAT IT WAS *ROBIN* WHO'S *REALLY* BEEN GIVING ME GRIEF ALL THESE YEARS.

THEY HELPED ME *FOCUS* MY RAGE.

WHO SAYS PSYCHOTHERAPY CAN'T HELP A GUY?

SO YOU'RE GOING TO OFF THE KID. BUT WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO FOR CASH?

A COMPUTER GLITCH GAVE ME MY FREEDOM. A MOOK NAMED HARVEY *KENT* WAS SUPPOSED TO GET PAROLED.

YEAH. WE SIGNED ONTO YOUR STRING 'CAUSE YOU'RE GOOD FOR HOT SCORES.

ugh.

BUT I THINK IT WAS *MORE* THAN A MISTAKE. IT WAS *FATE*.

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE WHOLE BASIS OF ARTIFICIAL THOUGHT IS *BINARY*? DO YOU SEE THE IRONY?

UH...YOU *LOST* ME.

THE WHOLE LANGUAGE AND LOGIC OF COMPUTERS IS CONTAINED IN *TWO* VALUES. *ONE* AND *ZERO*.

ONE. ZERO. ONE. ZERO. INTO INFINITY.

TWO VALUES THAT CAN BE MADE TO MEAN *ANY* THING. THE SUM OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE IN JUST THOSE *TWO*.

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ONE AND ZERO. TWO SIDES OF A COIN. TWO POSSIBILITIES LEADING TO *ENDLESS* POSSIBILITIES.

ONE NUMBER OUT OF PLACE AND I'M SET FREE.

WHAT IF THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF NUMBERS OUT OF PLACE?

WHAT IF WE *DUPLICATED* THE FOUL-UP THAT MADE ME A CITIZEN AGAIN?

YOU MEAN MONKEY WITH THE COPS' COMPUTER RECORDS?

THE COPS. THE COURTS. THE PRISONS. THE DISTRICT ATTORNEYS.

WHAT IF WE KNOCKED DOWN THE *WHOLE* HOUSE OF CARDS?

TOTAL PANDEMONIUM!

AND WE'LL BE AT THE *CENTER* OF IT ALL! PLAYING BOTH SIDES AGAINST THE MIDDLE!

NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS.

BUT A MAN'S GOTTA DO...

PENGEN'S HARD WARE

Dzerchenko QUALITY MEATS

Dzerchenk

TIMOTHY! SO NICE TO SEE YOU!

HUH?

WE HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN SO LONG.

WELL... ARIANA WON'T *TALK* TO ME ON THE PHONE, MRS. DZERCHENKO.

AND YOU CAME DOWN HERE TO *SEE* HER. THAT'S SWEET.

UH... I GUESS. IS ARI *HERE*?

SHE'S IN THE BACK MAKING BOXES. HAVE A *PITA* OD SIRA, TIMOTHY.

I DON'T...

MENU

JUST A TASTE. YOU'RE SO SKINNY.

UMPH.

ARI?

WHAT DO *YOU* WANT? I'M *BUSY*.

I KNOW YOU'RE MAD AT ME. I DON'T BLAME YOU. I FELL ASLEEP ON OUR FIRST DATE IN WEEKS.

HM.

BUT I HADN'T SLEPT RIGHT IN DAYS. MY DAD'S BACK NOW AND I HAVE TO RUN ALL KINDS OF ERRANDS FOR HIM AND I NEVER...

I WAS TELLING YOU SOMETHING REALLY IMPORTANT.

DO YOU EVEN REMEMBER WHAT I WAS SAYING?

SURE. YOU WERE TALKING. ABOUT...

IT WAS YOUR...

ABOUT THE...

I DON'T REMEMBER, ARI.

YOU'RE SMILING?

YOU HAVE SOME ICING IN THE CORNER OF YOUR MOUTH.

OH.

I'LL GET IT.

DO YOU THINK WE COULD--?

GO OUT? HOW ABOUT TOMORROW NIGHT?

SHUH-SURE.

I REALLY AM BUSY, TIM. CALL ME LATER TONIGHT.

RUH-RIGHT.

I WISH I KNEW WHAT JUST HAPPENED.

MY LIFE'S BEEN SO CRAZY LATELY. AND THE CRAZIEST PART IS...

...THAT THE CRAZIEST PART OF MY LIFE IS THE ONLY PART THAT MAKES SENSE.

I DON'T LIKE IT.

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE? IT'S IN. IT'S OUT.

HYPER MART

WE GOT THE ALARMS JINXED. WE BOUGHT THE SAFE COMBO. WE KNOW IT'S CRAMMED WITH WEEKEND RECEIPTS.

I JUST GOTTA FEELING.

A "FEELING." SHEEZ.

COULD YA GET OUTTA MY LIGHT A MINUTE?

I AIN'T IN YOUR LIGHT, TONY...

THEY ARE!

I-U-K

WAAK

UK!

KIND OF SMALL CHANGE, HUH?

YOU THINK THINGS HAVE BEEN SLOW, ROBIN?

WE HAVEN'T EXACTLY FACED ANY CRIMINAL MASTERMINDS LATELY.

KILLER CROC, THE VENTRILOQUIST AND RATCATCHER ARE JUST WIMPS, HUH?

THEY'RE NOT MASTERMINDS. WE JUST REACT TO THAT KIND OF HOOD.

I MEAN SOMETHING CHALLENGING. A CASE WE CAN SINK OUR TEETH INTO... SHARPEN OUR DETECTIVE SKILLS ON.

WELL, THIS IS GOTHAM. IF THERE'S NOT A CRIMEWAVE ON NOW...

"...JUST WAIT FIVE MINUTES."

GENTLEMEN OF THE BAR...

...I'VE CALLED YOU ALL TOGETHER, I'VE FLIPPED MY LUCKY COIN AND THE VERDICT IS...

12

BRAM BRAM BRAM BRAM

BRAK ABRAK

DEATH!

"THE FIRST THING WE DO, LET'S KILL ALL THE LAWYERS." DO YOU KNOW WHO SAID THAT?

YOU?

IDIOT.

THIS IS ONLY THE *BEGINNING*, GUYS. A ROOMFUL OF DEAD ATTORNEYS SHOULD SLOW THE WHEELS OF JUSTICE.

BUT WHERE'S THE SWAG? THE *PAYOFF*, TWO-FACE?

YOU'RE ANNOYING ME, RALPHIE.

WE *BREAK* THE SYSTEM! WE *CLOG* THE COURTS AND *SNARL* THE LEGAL MACHINE AND *CRAM* THE PRISONS!

WHEN WE DO *THAT*, THEN THE CITY WILL BE *WIDE* OPEN!

WE KILL *JUDGES* AND *JURORS* AND *LAWYERS* UNTIL GOTHAM SCREAMS TO A HALT.

AND DISTRICT ATTORNEYS... WE KILL A BUCKETFUL OF *THEM*. SELF-SERVING, POMPOUS CREEPS LIKE *HARVEY DENT*.

LET'S GO! WE GOT MORE WORK TO DO!

BUT AIN'T *HE* HARVEY--?

IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU, YOU'LL *SHUT UP*, RALPHIE.

14

SO, MOSES AND MURPHY, THE BOYS FROM HOMICIDE.

YOU GUYS TAKING THIS ONE?

ONE OF THE SURVIVORS SAID IT WAS *TWO-FACE* DID THE COUNSELORS IN.

THAT'S A MAJOR CRIMES BEEF, MONTOYA.

LOOKS LIKE IT'S *OURS*, HARV.

IF A MASS MURDER IS JUST DENT'S *WARM-UP*, WHAT ELSE HAS HE GOT PLANNED?

MAYBE WE CAN NAIL HIM EARLY.

GOOD LUCK WITH THIS ONE, BULLOCK.

BUT YOU BAG DENT AND IT'LL JUST BE THE *BEGINNING* OF YOUR TROUBLES.

WHY'S *THAT*, MURPH?

AFTER HE'S WASTED ALL THESE LAWYERS YOU WON'T KNOW WHETHER TO BOOK HIM OR GIVE HIM A *MEDAL*.'

THAT'S *COLD*, PARTNER.

I'D LIKE TO SEE *THOSE* TWO WITH A CHALKLINE AROUND THEM.

YOU KNOW, WE *CAN* GET HELP ON THIS ONE.

YEAH. THEY'RE PROBABLY *ALREADY* SNEAKING AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE.

15

"I HATE HAVING THOSE TWO PEEKING OVER MY SHOULDER ALL THE TIME."

NO APPARENT SCHEME YET. NO DUAL MOTIF. UNLESS THERE'S SOMETHING HERE I CAN'T SEE.

IT'S TOO EARLY IN THE GAME. TWO-FACE HASN'T SET A *PATTERN* YET.

NEARLY A *DOZEN* DEAD ALREADY AND IT'S JUST STARTING. WHAT IF I CAN'T STAY A STEP AHEAD OF DENT?

HOW MANY MORE ARE GOING TO *DIE* BECAUSE OF ME?

YOU CAN'T *THINK* OF IT LIKE THAT.

WHAT *OTHER* WAY IS THERE TO LOOK AT IT? TWO-FACE *MAKES* THE RULES.

IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY *ARE* AND YOU MAKE A WRONG GUESS THEN SOMEONE *DIES*. NO SECOND CHANCES. NO TIME-OUTS.

BUT IF YOU PUT THAT KIND OF PRESSURE ON YOURSELF YOU'LL CHOKE. WE HAVE TO *DISTANCE* OURSELVES.

THE COLD LIGHT OF REASON, HUH?

DISTANCE. MAYBE THAT'S WHAT MADE THE *REAL* BATMAN WHAT HE IS.

I NEVER GOT THE HANG OF THAT.

16

IT'S TEARING HIM APART INSIDE.

I CAN HEAR IT IN HIS VOICE.

DICK'S RUNNING IT THROUGH HIS MIND OVER AND OVER.

HIS FIRST TIME ALONE AGAINST TWO-FACE.

AN ERROR IN JUDGMENT THAT ALMOST GOT BRUCE KILLED.

IT ALMOST GOT DICK KILLED.

AND NOW ALL OF GOTHAM IS IN HIS CARE.

17

IF IT WERE ANYONE BUT TWO-FACE...

WE'LL GET HIM. WE HAVE TO.

MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T BE SO WILLING TO PLAY DENT'S GAME.

WHAT CHOICE DOES HE LEAVE US?

LET'S LOOK PAST THAT. WHY DOES HE WANT TO KILL LAWYERS?

DENT WAS A LAWYER. A PROSECUTING ATTORNEY.

HE HATES HIMSELF. HE HATES LAWYERS. THAT'S EASY.

WE'RE HUNG UP ON HIS "TWO" FIXATION.

MAYBE THERE'S A CONNECTION BETWEEN THESE LAWYERS.

I CAN BRING UP THE CITY COURT'S FILES AND GET A LIST OF LAWYERS ASSOCIATED WITH HARVEY DENT OR TWO-FACE.

WE CAN CHECK THAT AGAINST THE DINNER PARTY GUESTS.

GOTHAM CITY COURT DOCKET\ COTM CRT DKT\ P HELP!

JUST A FEW SCREENS AND PROMPTS TO GET AROUND AND I'LL MOUSE THROUGH--

WHOA.

WHAT IS IT?

NOTHING GOOD.

18

SO THIS IS WHERE IT ALL BEGAN. IN THE BASEMENT OF CITY COURTHOUSE.

THIS IS WHERE MY *PARDON* CAME FROM.

AND WE JUST *WALKED* RIGHT IN.

SO MUCH INFORMATION HERE. TRIAL DATES. DEFENSE ASSIGNMENTS. JUROR LISTS. PAROLE HEARINGS.

ALL KEPT TRACK OF IN THIS ROOM. WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS, THIS IS WHERE IT *DREAMS*.

JUST A SLIP OF THE DIGIT AND THE WRONG NAME IS TYPED IN AND I GO *FREE*.

WAIT A DAMN MINUTE!

WHAT'S THIS?

A *DOUBLE*-CROSS?

HELP!

19

WE'LL FLIP THE COIN FOR THESE COMPUTER GEEKS *LATER*! THEY MAKE ME *SICK*!

BUT FIRST WE PLAY WITH THE NUMBERS. WE CAN THROW THE GATES WIDE FOR A THOUSAND WORSE THAN *ME*!

A *RIPTIDE* OF THUGS AND SKELLS!

OW!

I'LL REARRANGE THEIR BYTES AND *THEN* WE'LL SEE HOW THE CITY MAKES ORDER OUT OF ELECTRONIC CHAOS!

JEEZE, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE A *COMPUTER* HACKER, TWO-FACE.

OH, I CAN HACK...

...I CAN *HACK* WITH THE BEST OF THEM!

MUP MUP

HOLD!!

I GOT YOUR BINARY RIGHT HERE!

SPING

SKKKRRRAAAWWW

BUT WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED.

CONTINUED IN BATMAN #513!!!

Cover art by KELLEY JONES AND JOHN BEATTY

Double Deuce

EVEN IN THE RECORDS ROOM'S COLD DARKNESS, THERE IS NO MISTAKING THE MAN WITH THE CHAINSAW.

FACING THE MAN, HE HAS FELT BOTH TERROR AND HORROR.

THAT WAS WHEN HE WAS THE FIRST ROBIN, A YOUNG DICK GRAYSON...

NOW HE IS THE BATMAN...

THE LIGHTS-- BACKUP GENERATORS KICKIN' IN!

klk

lk

BUT THE TERROR HAS NEVER LEFT HIM... NOR THE HORROR OF--

TWO-FACE.

DOUG MOENCH - WRITER
MIKE GUSTOVICH - GUEST PENCILLER
ROMEO TANGHAL - GUEST INKER
SPECIAL THANKS TO RICK BURCHETT
ADRIENNE ROY - COLORIST
KEN BRUZENAK - LETTERER
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL - ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNIS O'NEIL - EDITOR
BATMAN CREATED BY BOB KANE

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!

BLOW 'EM AWAY!!

THE GUNS, ROBIN!

HAK

SKANG

OWW!

SHUK

KEKT

GOT IT, TWO-FACE!

THEN GRAB ONE OF THESE PETRIFIED TECHNICIANS BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE, YOU IDIOT!

HWOK

WAM

FREEZE, FREAKS!

BRAZZZZZZ

STAY BACK--OR I CUT HIM IN TWO!

LET THEM GO, ROBIN...!

DON'T MAKE A MOVE.

DON'T MAKE A MISTAKE.

AND ABOVE ALL...

...DON'T MISJUDGE HIM.

ALL RIGHT-- BREAK FOR THE CAR!

FOLLOW-?

SLOWLY, ROBIN...

DON'T DO ANYTHING TO PROVOKE HIM.

YOU ALL RIGHT, MAN?

Y-YEAH...

KRR-OOOMM

HE'S GETTING AWAY...AND WE CAN'T EVEN PURSUE.

YEAH--MAYBE THIS WAS ONE TIME WE SHOULD'VE TAKEN THE BATMOBILE--

--RATHER THAN THAT SUBWAY ROCKET...

"...SINCE CARS CAN GO PLACES TRACKS DON'T."

THAT SAME STARE...

...TRAPPED IN HIS FACE THEN, AND HAUNTING IT JUST NOW...

SORRY, TWO-FACE, BUT I DON'T GET WHAT YOU'RE--

NEVER MIND--YOU DON'T HAVE TO GET IT.

BUT FOR YOUR SAKE, I HOPE YOU DID GET THE CORRECT ACCESS DISK...

IT'S RIGHT *HERE*, TWO-FACE, BUT I *STILL* DON'T SEE WHAT GOOD--

YOU *NEVER* SEE *ANYTHING*, DOLT, BUT WITH THAT DISK IN OUR POSSESSION...

"...CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN GOTHAM ARE ABOUT TO *SWITCH FACES*."

GOT TO FIND HIM... CAN'T FAIL *AGAIN*.

"AGAIN"--?

AFTER TAKING DOWN KILLER CROC, VENTRILOQUIST, AND RAT-CATCHER, I DON'T SEE WHERE YOU FAILED A *FIRST* TIME.

...AND IT ALL GOES BACK TO *TWO-FACE*...BACK WHEN I WAS ROBIN... THE *FIRST AND WORST* FAILURE...

YEAH...THE WAY YOU WARNED ME NOT TO MAKE A MISTAKE, NOT TO *"MISJUDGE"* HIM...

EXACTLY WHAT I *DID* THAT FIRST TIME... MISJUDGED HIM *COMPLETELY*.

ONE MAN *DIED*...AND THE BATMAN *ALMOST* DIED..

I *HAVE* FAILED, TIM, WITH KORY AND WITH THE *TITANS*...AS *NIGHTWING*...

NOW I'M THE BATMAN...

SADDLED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF YOUR OWN TAGALONG ROBIN--AND YOU'RE AFRAID I'LL DO WHAT YOU DID.

NO, TIM...IT'S NOT YOU I'M WORRIED ABOUT...NOT YOU AT ALL.

YOU HAD OTHER REASONS FOR ACCEPTING THIS BATMAN GIG, DIDN'T YOU--OTHER THAN JUST HELPING BRUCE...?

MAYBE I DID.

YOU'RE TESTING YOURSELF...

MORE LIKE HOPING TO PROVE MYSELF--BUY BACK SOME CONFIDENCE.

AND IT'S MY LAST CHANCE.

ONE MORE FAILURE... AND I'M EITHER DEAD OR OUT.

PUNISHMENT--

--AND "REHABILITATION"--

THE PARADOXICALLY OPPOSED FORCES OF THE TWO-FACED SYSTEM I ONCE SERVED AS DISTRICT ATTORNEY *HARVEY DENT*...

...AND WHOSE *JUDGMENT* I NOW HOLD IN MY *HAND.*

WITH BUT *TWO* *KEYSTROKES*--*COMMAND* AND *ENTER*--I CAN *SCRAMBLE* THE ENTIRE JUDICIAL AND CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM--

--MAKING THE GUILTY *INNOCENT* AND THE INNOCENT *NONEXISTENT.*

BUT SHOULD I *PRESS* THOSE TWO KEYS? SHOULD I *DESTROY* THE SYSTEM...

...OR TRY TO *REPAIR* IT?

VENGEANCE--?

OR REHABILITA-TION?

FLIP

PLT

VENGEANCE.

AND IT SERVES THE SYSTEM *RIGHT* FOR BEING HALF-DEFECTIVE *ALREADY*-

--FLAWED ENOUGH TO RELEASE SOMEONE LIKE *ME*.

AND *NOW*...

...LET THE *FULL* FORCE OF BINARY CHAOS *BEGIN*!

chek

tek

AWESOME.. YOU CAN COOK *AND* DO THE LAUNDRY?

HEY, IF THERE'S *TIME*, I MAY EVEN PUTTY SOME NEW PANES IN THOSE *SMASHED* WINDOWS.

BLIMEY--DOES ALFRED THE PENNYWORTH KNOW YOU'VE MASTERED *ALL* HIS DOMESTIC SECRETS?

WHO DO YOU THINK TAUGHT *HIM*?

NOT TO GET *TOO* SERIOUS, DICK, BUT IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU *LOOSE* AGAIN--AND GOOD TO SEE THE *MANOR* TAKING SHAPE, TOO.

SINCE JEAN PAUL DIDN'T *CARE* ABOUT IT AND BRUCE RELIES ON *ALFRED*, IT LOOKS LIKE *YOU* CAN TEACH A TRICK OR TWO THE *OTHER* BATMEN COULDN'T.

MAYBE...BUT WHEN *CAPE AND COWL* TIME COMES ROUND AGAIN, LET'S JUST HOPE I'M AS EFFECTIVE AS *EITHER* OF THEM.

I'VE SEEN YOU IN *ACTION*, PAL--YOU CAN HACK IT JUST *FINE*.

EVEN AGAINST *TWO-FACE*?

ESPECIALLY AGAINST HIM.

LIKE YOU *SAID*-- YOU *CAN'T* FAIL AGAIN--

"--NO MATTER *WHAT* THAT CREEP'S GOT IN STORE."

NEXT! STEP UP TO THE YELLOW LINE AND STATE YOUR *NAME AND NUMBER!*

JENSON, CRAIG--723495--BUT I'M *TELLIN'* YA...

...I AIN'T EVEN HAD NO *TRIAL* YET!

THIS COMPUTER PRINTOUT SAYS YOU *DID*, JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE HERE--ALTHOUGH I SURE DON'T KNOW WHERE TO *PUT* ALL YOU PEOPLE...

"...BEFORE THE *NEXT* BUSLOAD IS DELIVERED."

--CAN'T *OVERLOAD* ME LIKE THIS! THERE'S TOO MANY PRISONERS FOR THE *RESTRAINT CHAINS!*

SORRY, JOHNNY, BUT I CAN'T KEEP 'EM OUT HERE IN THE *RAIN*--NOT WHEN THEY'RE BRINGIN' *MORE* OUT TO ME IN *TEN MINUTES.*

BESIDES, YOU'LL MAKE IT TO BLACKGATE OKAY WITH *BUCKRUM RIDING SHOTGUN.*

AWRIGHT, JUST KEEP YOUR *DISTANCE*-- DON'T MAKE ME *NERVOUS.*

TOLD YA THEY LOADED US TOO HEAVY, BUCK-- PRISONERS IN THE AISLE AIN'T *RIGHT!*

TURN OFF THE *GRIEF*, JOHNNY, AND KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE --

SKREEEEE

-UNFF!

HEY! *BACK OFF!*

PUSH *HARDER!* JAM THAT *SHOTGUN!*

BAOUM

CHUSH

HEY!

SKAK

SKREEEEE

KNOB

PRISON

REGENCY

AL DOUBLE FEATURE
TTLE CAESAR
UBLIC ENEMY

AGENCY

SHRAMM

KRASH

GET THE SHACKLE KEYS! OPEN THE DOOR!

LET'S GET OUTTA HERE!

COME ON! OUT THE REAR EXITS BEFORE--

WAIT! LISTEN...

"SIRENS-- COMIN' FAST..."

WEEOOOWEEOOOWEEOOOWEEO

THEY'LL HAVE THIS THEATER SURROUNDED IN LESS THAN A MINUTE!

THEN IT LOOKS LIKE WE GOT US--

SHA KAK

--A HOSTAGE SITUATION.

AWRIGHT, SUCK CARPET!

BAOUM

BLASHH

EVERYBODY DOWN!!

POLICE SCANNER SAID THE *REGENCY*. THAT'S ON COIT BOULEVARD, JUST OFF--

I DON'T CARE *WHERE* IT IS.

THIS TIME WE TAKE--

"--THE *CAR*."

URAOWW!

COMMISSIONER HIMSELF'S OUT FRONT WITH A *BULLHORN*...

THEN GO TELL HIM WHAT WE *DECIDED*-

--AND SHUT THIS STINKIN' *MOVIE OFF!*

THE THEATER IS *SURROUNDED!* THERE IS *NO WAY OUT!* EMERGE *SLOWLY* WITH YOUR *HANDS ON YOUR HEADS!*

NO *DICE*, COMMISH?

NOT *YET*, SERGEANT BULLOCK, AND I WANT EVERY ON-SITE WEAPON INSPECTED-- *RUBBER BULLETS ONLY*--ESPECIALLY THE TEAMS AT THE *REAR*.

WITH ALL THE RECENT *COMPUTER FOUL-UPS*, SOME OF THESE MEN COULD ACTUALLY BE *INNOCENT*-- FORCED TO GO ALONG BY THE *OTHERS*...

AND MAKE SURE ALL PERSONNEL ARE EQUIPPED WITH *GAS MASKS.*

THERE'S ONLY *ONE WEAPON* IN THERE--A *SHOTGUN*-- BUT THEY'VE GOT *HOSTAGES.*

AND THERE'S NOTHIN' MORE *DESPERATE,* COMMISH, THAN PRISONERS WITH ONE FOOT ON THE *OUTSIDE*--SO WHEN DO WE *MOVE?*

IF THEY DON'T START COMING OUT IN--

YO, *SCREWS!*

BACK OFF OR WE START TAKIN' LESSONS FROM *CAGNEY!*

ONE MOVIE-LOVER EVERY *TEN MINUTES*-- STARTIN' *NOW!*

HE'S GONE, COMMISH-- THROUGH THE BUS AND BACK INTO THE *THEATER.*

WHERE THE DEVIL IS THAT *TACTICAL SQUAD* WITH THAT *TEAR GAS?!*

NO TIME TO *WAIT,* COMMISSIONER...

HIM AGAIN... THE *THIRD* ONE.

EVEN A SINGLE SHOTGUN CAN DO A LOT OF DAMAGE BEFORE GAS TAKES *EFFECT*--AND THE FIRST TEN MINUTES MAY BE UP BEFORE YOUR *SWAT* TEAM *GETS* HERE.

AN' THERE HE GOES--CHARGIN' OFF LIKE THE DARK KNIGHT TO MAKE US COPS LOOK LIKE COURT JESTERS.

I DON'T LIKE IT ANY MORE THAN YOU DO, SERGEANT...

AT LEAST, NOT LATELY.

TEN MINUTES ARE UP! GRAB THE FIRST LAMB!

TIME TO SHOW 'EM WE MEAN-

FREEZE!

HUH?

BEHIND THE SCREEN-!

BAOUM

PHOOM

EXIT

PRUTCH

PAFT

SNOK

THRAKK

SHHOK

MOVE IT! THERE'S ALREADY BEEN A SHOTGUN BLAST INSIDE THE THEATER!

CHUFT

SHUMP

FIRE! I WANT THAT TEAR GAS IN THERE--

CHUF

CHUF

"--NOW!!"

KTUNK TSS

KUNK SSSS

TUNK SSSS

koff a-huk

HWOK

SWAK

WAK

KAK

koff koff

ALL RIGHT, WE'RE GOING IN- FRONT AND BACK!

LET'S MOVE!

AND HE'S ALREADY GONE... BUT THAT KINDA FIGURES, COMMISH, DON'T IT?

JUST GET THESE PEOPLE OUT INTO THE FRESH AIR, SERGEANT BULLOCK...

...AND FORGET THE BATMAN- WHOEVER HE IS NOW.

THE MOMENT IS NEAR...

IF YOU SAY SO, TWO-FACE.

BATMAN'S DEATH WILL DESTROY ROBIN...VENGEANCE DOUBLE WITH A SINGLE ROPE.

BUT ONE THING I DON'T GET...

WHY DON'T WE OFF ROBIN, TOO, KILLIN' TWO BIRDS WITH ONE--

~URGH-K?!

BLITHERING FOOL-!

AGH-K!

CHUPT

BLIND JUSTICE *HERSELF* IS THE OTHER HALF OF THIS *DOUBLED DOSE OF VENGEANCE!*

THIS IS *REAL* BAD-POLICE, JUDICIAL AND CORRECTIONAL RECORDS HAVE ALL BEEN INVADED AND TURNED TO *HASH.*

CYBERSPACE SABOTAGE TO THE *MAX.*

HE'S DESTROYING THAT WHICH HE BLAMES FOR HIS *OWN* DESTRUCTION...

...THE ENTIRE *CRIMEFIGHTING APPARATUS OF THE CITY.*

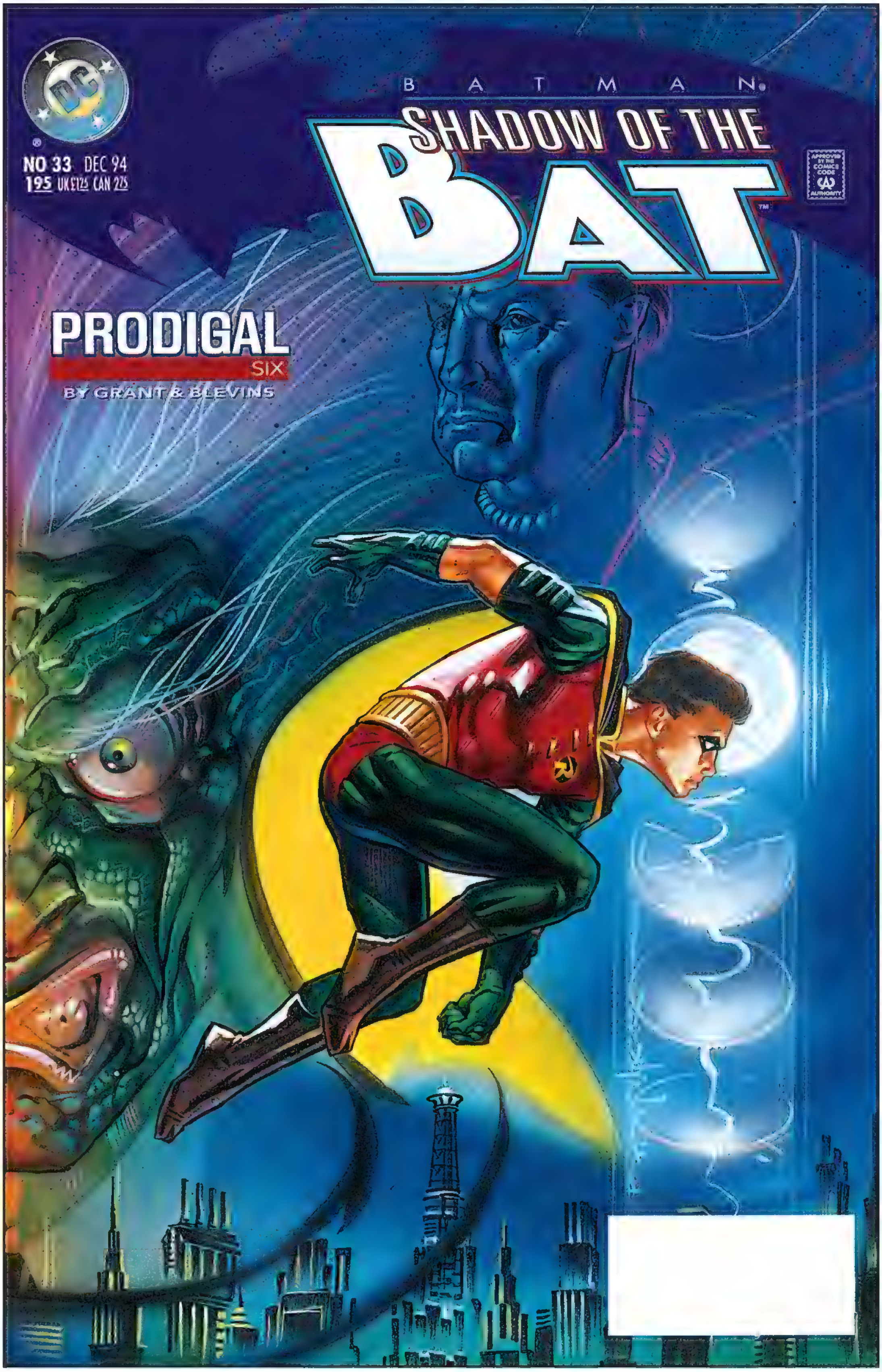
AND IF THIS RUNS PAR FOR HIS USUAL COURSE, DICK... HIS FINAL TARGET WILL PROBABLY BE--

YEAH-- THE *BATMAN.*

ME.

CONTINUED IN *SHADOW of the BAT #33*

Cover art by **BRIAN STELFREEZE**



ONE/ZERO...ON/OFF...
START/STOP...YES/NO...

GOOD/BAD.

IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE HIM, THAT THE WHOLE UNIVERSE AND EVERYTHING *IN* IT IS FOUNDED ON THE TENSION BETWEEN THOSE SIMPLE OPPOSITES.

AND IF YOU PROGRAM IN A *DIFFERENCE*, NO MATTER *HOW* SMALL--

--SOONER OR LATER, THE WHOLE THING FALLS TO PIECES. JUST AS *GOTHAM CITY* HAS FALLEN BEFORE HIS ATTACK ON THE SYSTEM THAT SUSTAINS IT.

A CITY SEIZED UP, PARALYZED, LIVING IN FEAR. HE SHOULD BE PLEASED. SURELY THIS IS THE BUILD-UP HE PLANNED, LEADING TO HIS FINEST-EVER MOMENT? BUT SOMETHING IS MISSING--

IT'S TOO *ONE*-SIDED. THAT'S THE PROBLEM, *RALPHIE*.

IT LACKS A SENSE OF *BALANCE!*

STICK AROUND, RALPHIE.

I HAVE TO GO SEE A MAN ABOUT A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY...!

KENT HARVEY
221c FINGER ST.

I KNOW WE HAVE A DOZEN DEAD D.A.S! I KNOW THE JAILS ARE BURSTING AND THE ENTIRE COURT SYSTEM IS PARALYZED! I KNOW THAT CRIME RATES ARE SHOOTING OFF THE SCALE!

BUT EXCUSE ME FOR SAYING, MAYOR KROL -- IF I COULD SPEND LESS TIME ON THE PHONE, AND MORE ON THE JOB, WE'D HAVE A MUCH BETTER CHANCE OF CATCHING TWO-FACE!

I'LL KEEP YOU INFORMED... SIR!

EASY, JIM. DON'T LET HIM GET TO YOU!

DON'T WORRY. RIGHT NOW KROL'S JUST A MINOR IRRITANT -- A PIMPLE ON THE FACE OF MY LIFE! TWO-FACE IS AT THE HEART OF THE POISON!

IF I COULD JUST FIGURE OUT HIS PLAN...!

USUALLY HIS CRIMES COME WITH A TWO OR DUAL MOTIF... BUT NOT THIS TIME. WHY? WHAT DOES HE GAIN BY DESTROYING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM?

WHO CAN READ THE MIND OF A PSYCHOPATH?

MAYBE BATMAN COULD HELP--

WHICH ONE? THERE HAVE BEEN AT LEAST *THREE* BATMEN IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS--

--AND ONLY AN IDIOT WOULD TRUST *ANY* OF THEM.

AN IDIOT LIKE ME?

SARAH! THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT! I--

OH, NEVER MIND!

WELL? WHAT *DID* YOU MEAN?

I WISH I'D NEVER HEARD OF THE BATMAN!

QUIT SHOVIN'!

--I NEVER DID NOTHIN'!

--KNIFED HIM IN THE FACE--

--GONNA BE SICK!

--HEARD ABOUT *TATUM*? FIVE HUNDRED YEARS!

--OFF THIS STINKIN' BOAT!

--OWE ME, YA LOWLIFE!

--MAW GOT AWAY!

KARUUM!

SI-LENCE!

THE NEXT MAN TO SPEAK DOES A ***WEEK*** IN ***THE HOLE!***

IN CASE YOU HADN'T NOTICED, LIEUTENANT, ***BLACKGATE PENITENTIARY*** STANDS ON AN ***ISLAND***. OUR SPACE IS, THEREFORE, STRICTLY ***LIMITED***.

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES CAN WE ACCEPT ***ONE*** MORE PRISONER!

I'M AFRAID YOU'VE NO OPTION, ***WARDEN ZEHRHARD***. POLICE HOLDING TANKS ARE JAMMED. WE HAVE TO PUT THEM ***SOME***WHERE!

MAYBE YOU COULD ***DOUBLE*** THEM UP...?

THEY ARE ***ALREADY*** DOUBLED UP!

MORE PRISONERS! IT'S GONNA BE WORSE'N JACKCITY IN HERE!

THEY CAN'T DO THIS TO US, MAN! WE'RE ***LIFERS!***

I BEEN THINKIN', GUYS...

4

THEN YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO *TRIPLE* THEM, WARDEN -- OR MAYBE PUT THEM IN WITH THE *ARKHAM INMATES* YOU'RE HOUSING HERE.

NO!

LAST TIME WE LET THEM MIX, THERE WAS A *RIOT!* WE KEEP THEM STRICTLY *APART!*

WE'LL PUT THEM IN THE CHAPEL FOR NOW.

IF YOU BRING US ANY MORE, EQUIP THEM WITH *TENTS*. THEY CAN *CAMP OUT* ON THE RECREATION FIELD!

YOU GOT A *PLAN*, TATUM?

SURE, *JOSEY*.

IT'LL BE A *RIOT!*

HEY! YOU CAN'T JUST COME BARGING IN HERE--!

THIS LITTLE PAIR SAYS I CAN BARGE INTO HELL ITSELF, MR. KENT!

I KNOW YOU! YOU'RE TWO-FACE--THE MANIAC THE COPS RELEASED BY MISTAKE INSTEAD OF ME!

MANIAC?

A...A...A... SLIP OF THE TONGUE...!

DON'T LET IT SLIP TWICE, MR. KENT.

FORTUNATE THAT THE POLICE RELEASED YOU, TOO. WE ARE SOUL-BROTHERS, YOU AND I. BROUGHT TOGETHER BY A CAPRICIOUS FATE--AND I SHOULD HATE TO HAVE TO KILL YOU.

YET!

OUR DESTINIES ARE ENTWINED, MR. KENT. LET US RUSH TO MEET THEM AT DOUBLE SPEED!

A GREAT PITY *BRUCE WAYNE* IS OUT OF TOWN AND CANNOT BE REACHED, *MR. FOX*--

NECORP

I ALWAYS PREFER TO DEAL WITH THE *ORGAN-GRINDER* RATHER THAN HIS *MONKEY!*

MR. WAYNE LEFT *ME* IN SOLE CHARGE OF *WAYNECORP, MR. IGNATOV.* I BEAR *FULL* RESPONSIBILITY FOR *EVERYTHING* THAT HAPPENS HERE.

OUT

IN

YOU'RE ALREADY CUTTING INTO A VERY FULL SCHEDULE. PLEASE--GET TO THE POINT OF THIS VISIT!

VERY WELL.

NOW THAT THE FORMER SOVIET UNION HAS EMBRACED *CAPITALISM*, MANY OPPORTUNITIES ARE CONSTANTLY ARISING FOR MUTUALLY-BENEFICIAL *DEALS*. THE CONSORTIUM I REPRESENT--*TROIKA*--WOULD LIKE TO DO BUSINESS WITH *YOU*.

WAYNECORP ALREADY HAS A NUMBER OF RUSSIAN CONTACTS WORKING ON OUR BEHALF. I FAIL TO SEE WHAT TROIKA CAN OFFER US THAT THEY CAN'T.

TROIKA IS AN *INSURANCE* CONGLOMERATE. FOR A NOT-UNREASONABLE PREMIUM WE WILL UNDERTAKE TO *SAFEGUARD* WAYNECORP'S INTERESTS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

I AM SURE YOU'RE AWARE OF THE DANGERS--TERRORISM, DISGRUNTLED EMPLOYEES, LOCAL HOODLUMS. TROIKA WILL TAKE CARE OF THEM ALL.

LET ME SPELL IT OUT FOR YOU, MR. FOX!

WE HAVE OUR OWN SECURITY, THANK YOU!

I THINK THEY WILL NOT BE SO EFFICIENT, MR. FOX--

KCHOW!

YOU UNDERSTAND? I STRONGLY SUGGEST YOU SIGN UP FOR OUR SERVICES!

SEE FOR YOURSELF HOW EFFICIENT THEY ARE!

ESCORT HIM FROM THE BUILDING! IF HE COMES BACK, HAVE THE *POLICE* CHARGE HIM FOR HIS *THREATENING BEHAVIOR!*

YOU MAKE A BIG MISTAKE, MR. FOX.

I'LL BE IN TOUCH!

DON'T BOTHER!

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YOU HEARD WHAT MR. FOX SAID-- DON'T COME BACK!

NO GO.

WE DO IT THE HARD WAY!

OFFICERS--!

BLAMBLAMBLAMBLAM!!

VERY SOON, MR. FOX!

THIS IS GETTING ABSURD, SIR!

DELAY THE EVENING MEAL! WE'LL PUT THEM IN THE DINING HALL!

WE DON'T KNOW WHO'S *INNOCENT* OR WHO'S *GUILTY*-- WHO'S SERVING *THIRTY DAYS* AND WHO'S DOING *THIRTY YEARS!*

THE SOONER THE CITY GETS THIS MORASS SORTED OUT, THE BETTER...

"...THESE CONDITIONS ARE *RIPE* FOR *RIOT!*"

WE WANT OUR DINNER! WE GOT *RIGHTS!* YA *GOTTA* FEED US!

GET THEM BACK TO THEIR CELL BLOCKS!

KEEP THE NEW ARRIVALS APART-->*hnf!*<

LET'S WAX 'EM, MAN!

KEEP IT DOWN! SPREAD THE WORD-- WAIT FER MY SIGNAL!

THE SPOTLIGHT! WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN THERE--?

RATATATATATATAT RATAT

SKAAASH!

POLICE? ZEHRHARD, BLACKGATE!

WE HAVE TROUBLE--

SKASH!

SKAZZ!

--SECURITY GUARDS SHOT AT THE WAYNE BUILDING. MONTOYA AND BULLOCK WILL HANDLE!

ROBBERY IN PROGRESS. HACKET'S ALLEY!

THE WAYNE BUILDING? WONDER WHAT *THAT* WAS ABOUT? MAYBE WE SHOULD GO CHECK--

WAIT!

POLICE? ZEHRHARD, BLACKGATE! WE HAVE TROUBLE--

AAAH!

THAT'S ALL! HE MUST HAVE BEEN CUT OFF!

ZEHRHARD'S THE WARDEN. IF THIS IS *SERIOUS*, IT COULD BE LIKE *BANE'S* BUST-OUT AT *ARKHAM* ALL OVER AGAIN!

IT *HAS* TO BE TWO-FACE'S WORK! COME ON!

MAKE SURE WHAT WE NEED IS IN THE TRUNK!

I'LL JUST FAMILIARIZE MYSELF WITH THE TERRAIN!

--BOTH PROFIT FROM AN EARLY NIGHT, SARAH. WE'RE FAR TOO TENSE!

TELL ME! I'VE HAD FOUR *HOURS'* DOWN-TIME IN THE PAST THREE DAYS -- AND WE'RE *STILL* NO NEARER TO TWO-FACE!

WHAT'S UP?

NOTHING. I WAS JUST WONDERING... WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

I COULD *REALLY* USE A GOOD MEAL!

STICK SOMETHING LO-FAT IN THE MICRO-WAVE AND OPEN AN ORANGE JUICE!

SLOW DOWN. I THOUGHT WE'D SPEND A QUIET NIGHT IN -- ENJOY A DECENT MEAL -- WATCH A MOVIE -- RELAX...

YOU KNOW?

I KNOW I RELAX BY SLEEPING, JIM!

WHAT'S WRONG?

ARE YOU STILL MAD AT ME ABOUT BATMAN...?

SARAH...?

--TROUBLE AT BLACKGATE, COMMISSIONER! WE'VE SENT OUT THE HARBOR PATROL!

BEEP

I'M ON MY WAY!

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READY?

um...

I'M NOT TOO SURE. I'VE ONLY DONE THIS A COUPLE OF TIMES -- AND NEITHER WAS FROM ANYTHING LIKE *THIS* HEIGHT!

THERE'S NO OTHER WAY. IF THE RIOTERS HAVE TAKEN CONTROL OF THE GUARD TOWERS, ANY ATTACK FROM THE *WATER* WILL BE *SUICIDE*.

WE NEED THE THERMALS TO GET US OVER!

MAYBE I SHOULD SIT THIS ONE OUT.

DON'T LOOK SO GLUM! BETTER YOU'RE MATURE ENOUGH TO *REALIZE* YOUR LIMITS THAN TO FIND OUT LATE THAT YOU DON'T. BESIDES--

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--I'D HATE TO HAVE TO EXPLAIN TO **BRUCE** WHY I HAD TO **SCRAPE** YOU OFF THE **ROAD!**

IT'S LIKE ANOTHER WORLD UP HERE, AWAY FROM GRAVITY'S CRUSHING HOLD. SILENT AND PEACEFUL.

THE MAN IN THE COSTUME FEELS ALMOST AT EASE WITH HIMSELF. **ALMOST.**

HE HAS NO QUALMS ABOUT HIS ABILITY TO DO WHAT HE'S SET OUT TO DO. HE KNOWS WITHOUT DOUBT THAT HIS SKILLS ARE ADEQUATE TO THE TASK.

IT'S WHAT'S **BEYOND** THIS THAT UNNERVES HIM. THE INEVITABLE CLIMAX TO THIS BLOODY MAYHEM-- WHEN HE HAS TO TAKE ON ITS DEMENTED PERPETRATOR HIMSELF--

TWO-FACE. THAT FIRST-EVER ENCOUNTER STILL BURNS IN HIS MIND. DESPITE HIS BEST EFFORTS, HE FOULED UP. BADLY. FATALLY.

HE'S TERRIFIED THE MASTER OF THE DOUBLE-EDGE WILL MAKE IT HAPPEN AGAIN--AND DICK GRAYSON WILL HAVE *ANOTHER* DEATH ON HIS CONSCIENCE.

WHAT--?

THEY'RE *CRAZY!* IF THAT TOWER'S IN CONVICT HANDS--

BADDABADDABADDABADDABADDA

FINISH 'EM OFF, NATE!

WE CAN HOLD THIS PLACE AGAINST AN ARMY!

THOK!

PUK!

THUK!

NO HARM STIRRING THINGS UP A LITTLE...!

WAS I RIGHT OR WHAT? *THIS* IS HOW TO BEAT THE BOREDOM BLUES, YEAH?

TATUM! *LOOK--!*

DAMN! HOW'D HE GET OUT HERE SO FAST?

HOW DO THINGS STAND, JOSEY?

NOT TOO GOOD, BIG GUY! WE GOT TWO GUARD TOWERS-- BUT ZEHRHARD HAS *COMMUNICATIONS* SEALED OFF, AND GUARDS HAVE *LOCKED* THEMSELVES IN THE *WEAPONS* STORE!

TAKE OVER HERE!

I'M GONNA SEE IF I CAN RAISE MORALE A LITTLE...!

WOULDN'T IT BE SOMETHIN' IF WE COULD TAKE DOWN THE BATMAN...?

HUH?

MY EYES--!

AAAH!

LET US IN THERE, ARKHAM! WE GOT A *SCORE* TO SETTLE WITH YER *KOOKS!*

NOT ONE HAIR ON MY CHARGES' HEADS WILL BE HARMED--EXCEPT OVER MY *DEAD BODY!*

IF THAT'S THE WAY YA WANT IT...

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GUH-GAS...!

NNGHH!

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

HEY, HERO! I'M CALLING YOU OUT!

YOU AND ME, BIG-SHOT--HERE AND NOW! WHAT DO YOU SAY?

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YOUR FUN'S OVER! DROP YOUR WEAPONS AND RETURN TO YOUR CELLS!

ANY MAN WHO FORCES ME TO DEAL WITH HIM PERSONALLY--

WAK!

--I *SWEAR* THAT MAN WILL *REGRET* IT!

AFTER WHAT HAPPENED WITH ARKHAM ASYLUM, YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT THEY'D HAVE DEVELOPED *CONTINGENCY PLANS* FOR BLACKGATE!

I BELIEVE MAYOR KROL SET UP A *COMMITTEE*, LIEUTENANT.

IT'S DUE TO REPORT NEXT SUMMER!

YO, COMMISSIONER! IT'S ALL OVER!

THE *BATMAN* WAS HERE! EVERYTHING'S ALL RIGHT!

I WISH IT WAS. I REALLY WISH IT *WAS!*

THE NIGHT IS HIS--AND YET HIS FACE IS GRIM. IT'S TIME TO STOP MERELY REACTING, TIME TO TAKE THE GAME OUT OF TWO-FACE'S HANDS.

HALL OF RECORDS SUBBASEMENT
NOT IN USE

WHY, MR. TWO-FACE? WHY HAVE YOU *TIED* ME UP?

WHO ARE YOU *WAITING* FOR?

FEAR CLUTCHES HIS HEART LIKE A LIVING THING, BUT HIS FLIGHT NEVER FALTERS.

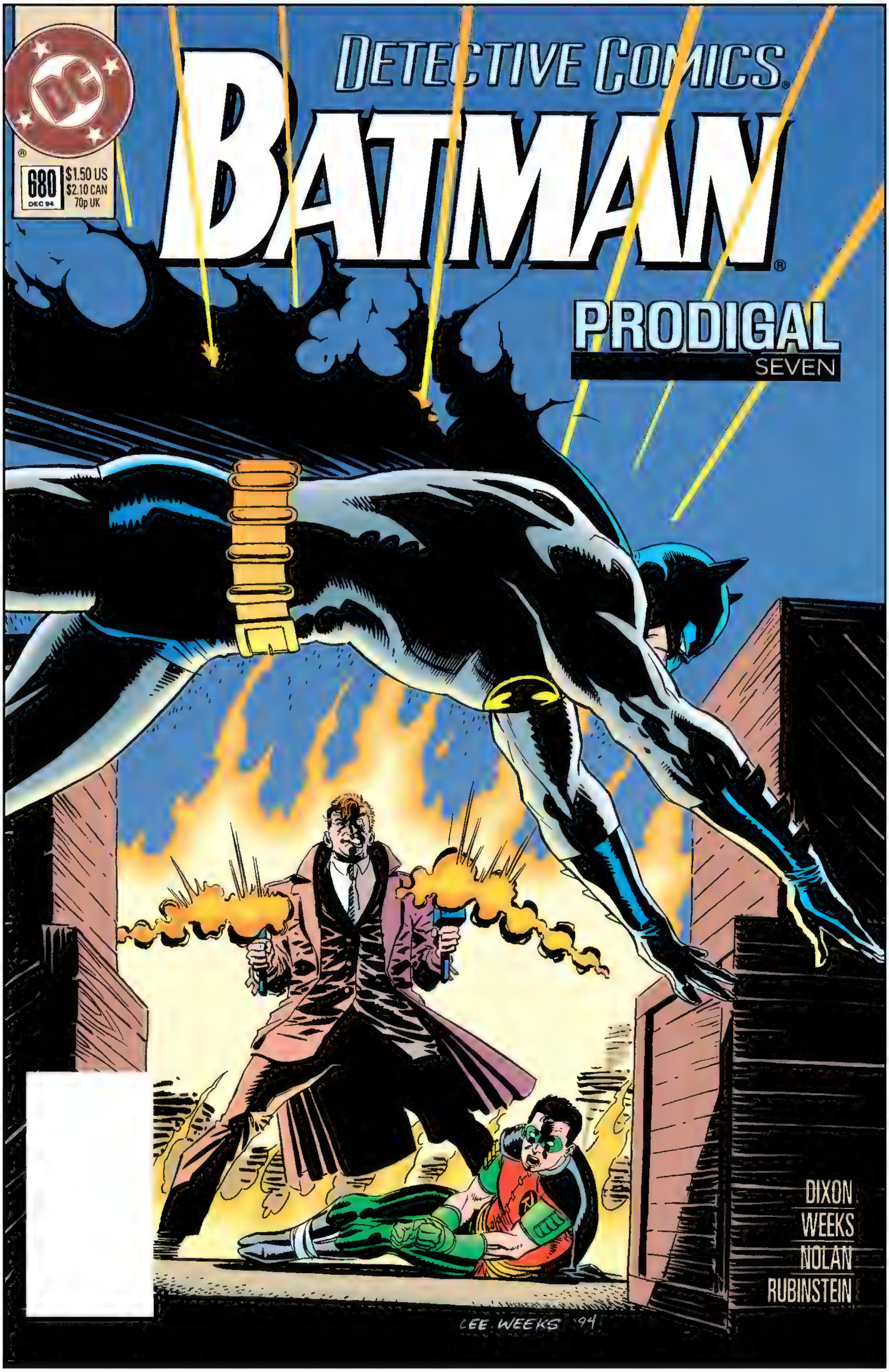
HE IS THE BATMAN. HE WILL *WIN* THE DAY... OR *PERISH* TRYING.

PATIENCE, MR. KENT. WE ARE AT THE *FULCRUM*--THE *BALANCE POINT* AROUND WHICH THE WHOLE UNIVERSE REVOLVES.

I AM THE *SPIDER*... AND WE'RE WAITING FOR THE *FLY!*

CONTINUED IN *DETECTIVE COMICS #680!*

Cover art by LEE WEEKS



A COMPUTER GLITCH.

A TRANSPOSED LETTER IN A NAME ON A SINGLE SHEET OF THE MOUNTAIN OF PAPER-WORK THIS CITY PRODUCES EACH DAY.

END OF THE ROAD, LAWMAN. WE MAKE THE RULES NOW.

YOU CAN'T HOLD US. YOU CAN'T KEEP US.

AND GOTHAM IS PLUNGED INTO A MAELSTROM OF VIOLENCE.

A TWICE TOLD TALE

by

CHUCK DIXON. writer
LEE WEEKS and GRAHAM NOLAN. pencillers
JOE RUBINSTEIN. guest inker
ADRIENNE ROY. colorist
JOHN COSTANZA. letterer
DARREN VINCENZO. associate editor
SCOTT PETERSON. editor
BATMAN created by BOB KANE

THE SCUM RISE LIKE A TIDE

TWO-FACE'S ATTACK ON THE LEGAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE CITY HAS SUCCEEDED.

THOUSANDS OF HOODS HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM LOCK UP.

THOSE THAT ARE ALREADY FREE ARE EMBOLDENED.

AND EVERY ONE IS A DISTRACTION FROM THE OBJECT OF HIS SEARCH.

THE TWISTED GENIUS AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL.

HARVEY DENT.

TWO-FACE.

A TWO-PRONGED ATTACK ON GOTHAM'S LEGAL LIBRARY.

AND *THIS* IS THE SECOND PART.

GOTHAM HAS ALWAYS BEEN A *LOW-TECH* KIND OF TOWN.

STILL STORING LEGAL DOCUMENTS AND DOCKETS AND TRANSCRIPTS ON MOLDERING PAPER.

THE SPIKE IN THE CITY COURTS' COMPUTER SYSTEM CREATED A *REMARKABLE* LEVEL OF ANARCHY.

BUT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE HALL OF RECORDS WILL BE AN *APOCALYPSE!*

UH... I WAS WONDERING... I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND...

WHAT EXACTLY AM I DOING HERE?

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CLOSURE, HARVEY KENT! THE FATES BROUGHT US TOGETHER AND WE FACE THE FUTURE SHOULDER TO SHOULDER!

A SYMBIOSIS, MISTER KENT!

BUT...BUT I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOUR RELEASE. THEY JUST TYPED DENT INSTEAD OF KENT ON THE RELEASE FORM.

JUST AN ACCIDENT... A FOUL-UP...

THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS, KENT! THERE'S ONLY LUCK! ONLY CHANCE!

THERE'S ONLY WINNERS AND LOSERS.

RIGHT NOW, I'M FREE AND ON TOP.

CAPRICIOUS FATE AND MY OWN BRILLIANT PLANNING WILL KEEP IT THAT WAY.

AND BATMAN'S DEATH IS A BIG PART OF THOSE PLANS!

LOT OF GOOD I'M DOING.

TWO-FACE IS TEARING GOTHAM APART AND ALL I CAN DO IS MOUSE AROUND LOOKING FOR ANSWERS ON MY PC.

DICK SAYS I WAS USING MY HEAD WHEN I BACKED AWAY FROM JOINING HIS SORTIE INTO BLACKGATE.

BUT I CAN'T HELP FEELING LIKE I PUNKED OUT.

I'M GETTING NOWHERE FAST ON MY OWN.

BUT I KNOW WHO *MIGHT* HAVE SOME EDUCATED GUESSES.

YOU'RE STILL *AWAKE*, TIM?

HELLO...?

UH, I WAS ON THE PHONE. I'LL BE OFF IN A *MINUTE*, DAD.

HELLO?

IS IT A GIRL OR HOMEWORK, TIM?

UH... A LITTLE OF *BOTH*, DAD.

GOTHAM KNIGHTS

CARRY ON, SON.

ROBIN, RIGHT?

YEAH. MY DAD WAS LISTENING IN AND...

I CAN *RELATE*.

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YOU HAVE TO CALL HIM, JIM.

I DO NOT.

WE *NEED* HIS HELP. UNTIL WE CAN STOP HARVEY DENT'S RAMPAGE AND PUT THE JUSTICE MACHINE BACK TOGETHER AGAIN--

NO!

WE'LL DO THE JOB WE WERE *HIRED* TO DO, SARAH.

I JUST CAN'T PLACE BLIND TRUST IN THE BATMAN ANYMORE. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO I'M *DEALING* WITH HALF THE TIME!

I'VE *NEVER* BEEN BATMAN'S BIGGEST FAN. BUT THIS IS *EXACTLY* THE TIME WHEN WE NEED HIM *MOST*.

HE UNDERSTANDS DENT. HE'S TAKEN HIM DOWN BEFORE. PUT AWAY YOUR PRIDE AND--

MAYBE IT'S A MISTAKE HAVING *MY WIFE* HEAD MAJOR CRIMES.

MAYBE IF WE WEREN'T *MARRIED* YOU WOULDN'T BE SECOND-GUESSING ME THIS WAY!

REALLY?!

IF YOU WANT ME OUT OF MAJOR CRIMES, THEN YOU *FIRE* ME!

AND IF YOU THINK OUR MARRIAGE WAS A MISTAKE...

OH BOY...

...THEN YOU CAN FIRE ME FROM *THAT* THANKLESS JOB TOO, COMMISSIONER!

TWO-FACE IS OFF HIS USUAL DUALITY GIG.

EITHER THAT OR I JUST CAN'T SEE THE GIMMICK FOR THE TREES.

MAYBE HE'S FINISHED. MAYBE HE'S DONE WHAT HE SET OUT TO DO.

BUT WE KNOW BETTER, RIGHT?

YEAH, WISHFUL THINKING.

SO OTHER THAN BOLLIXING THE CITY'S COMPUTER RECORDS AND KNOCKING OFF DISTRICT ATTORNEYS AND JUDGES AND PACKING THE PRISONS...

WHAT'S HIS GOAL? WHAT'S HE WANT?

CHAOS. REVENGE.

ON WHOM?

WELL, BATMAN... ME... THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE...

WHAT DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOES HE HATE THE MOST?

UM... HIMSELF? HE HATES HARVEY DENT. HE HATES EVERY--

WHAT'S THAT CLICK?

CALL WAITING. HANG ON.

OH, HI. KIND OF LATE, ISN'T IT?

I JUST THOUGHT I'D CALL. I NEEDED TO HEAR A FRIENDLY VOICE, I GUESS.

WELL...

... I WAS RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING, DAD.

SOUNDS GREAT, DAD! 'BYE!

I'M SORRY, BARBARA. MAYBE I'LL CALL YOU TOMORROW.

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ROBIN?

STILL HERE.

THERE'S ONE PLACE HE HASN'T HIT. THE HALL OF RECORDS ANNEX.

GOTHAM'S STILL IN THE DARK AGES AS FAR AS COMPUTERIZING. THE ANNEX STILL HOLDS MOST OF THE COURT DOCUMENTS.

AND CRIMINAL JACKETS AND EVEN EVIDENCE.

IT'S WORTH CHECKING OUT.

HENDRICKS!

AMES GORDON COMMISSIONER OF GOTHAM

CYNERGISM HOTLINE 1 800 555 0049

PARENTS HOTLINE

GET ME A COT OUT OF STORAGE AND BRING IT IN HERE.

I HEARD YOUR TIFF WITH THE LIEUTENANT, SIR. ANYTHING YOU WANT TO *TALK* ABOUT?

WE CAN TALK ABOUT YOU WORKING A SOLO BEAT IN THE CANAL ZONE IF THAT COT ISN'T HERE IN FIVE MINUTES.

FIVE *MINUTES*, COMMISH! NO *PROBLEM!*

"I'M ON THE CASE!"

HUSTLE IT UP!

WHAT'S THIS PLACE, SHERIFF?

WE'RE STORING YOUR SORRY BUTTS IN A HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM UNTIL WE CAN CLEAR SOME COTS AT THE COUNTY LOCK UP.

MAYBE YOU CAN WORK ON YOUR DIPLOMA WHILE YOU'RE HERE, LOWLIFE.

NOW, CZONK!

I GOT IT!

UNNH!

CLUEMASTER, RIGHT?

EVERYBODY STAND BACK OR DEPUTY DOG GETS A *BAYWINDOW* BLOWN THROUGH HIM.

YEAH, LAY YOUR GUNS DOWN!

BEAUTIFUL. NOW STEP BACK THREE GIANT STEPS.

ANYBODY COMES TO FOLLOW US, CON *OR* COP, AND I'LL BLAST THEM.

WHAT *NEXT*, ARTIE?

WE *RUN!*

THOSE COPS CAN'T CHASE US AND LEAVE THOSE OTHER LOSERS UNGUARDED.

USE THAT SCATTERGUN AND BLOW THIS *CHAIN*, ARTIE.

AND LEAVE US WITH *ONE* SHELL? NO *WAY*, CZONK!

HEY!

OH...

ANOTHER DISTRACTION. ANOTHER DELAY.

HE HAS TO GET TO THE CAUSE OF THIS PLAGUE.

...NO!

IT'S NOT SO EASY WITH THESE SYMPTOMS ON THE LOOSE.

12

HE'S NO CLOSER THAN HE WAS EARLIER.

THE PURSUIT IS A MENTAL AS WELL AS A PHYSICAL EXERCISE.

HOW WE GONNA GET THEM *DOWN* FROM THERE?

PERSONALLY, I'D LET THEM HANG THERE 'TIL EASTER.

BUT I GUESS WE CAN CALL CITY SERVICES AND GET A BUCKET TRUCK OUT HERE FOR THEM.

DAMN. AND I JUST HAD THIS BABY RE-BLUED. LOOK AT HOW THEY *DINGED* IT.

YOU HAVE ONE MESSAGE.

PLAY IT.

<DEET.> THIS IS ROBIN! I'VE GOT A STRONG HUNCH WE'LL FIND HARVEY DENT AT THE RECORDS ANNEX IN MIDTOWN.

I MIGHT BE THERE BY THE TIME YOU GET THIS.

DON'T WORRY. I'LL KEEP LOW AND STAY OUT OF --

...TROUBLE.

THAT'S ALL YOU ARE TO ME, KID. JUST *TROUBLE.*

EVERY TIME I THINK I GOT YOU MASKED CREEPS OUT OF MY LIFE, THERE'S ANOTHER ONE TO TAKE YOUR PLACE.

HOW MANY ROBINS HAVE THERE *BEEN*, HUH? WE *MET* BEFORE, RIGHT?

YOU HELPED ME GET THE *JOB*, TWO-FACE. *YOU* WERE *MY* FIRST SLAM-DUNK. KIND OF LIKE AN *AUDITION.*

LITTLE PUNK.

WELL, THE *FIRST* ROBIN I RAN INTO DIDN'T DO SO WELL. I PUT HIM IN TRACTION.

DID MY BEST TO *KILL* HIM.

I COULD SMELL THE *FEAR* ON HIM.

I *GOT* TO HIM. I *OWN* HIM.

JUST LIKE I'M GONNA OWN *BATMAN* WHEN HE FINDS OUT I KILLED HIS NEW ROBIN.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HIS REACTION'S GONNA BE, KID?

WHAT'S IT GONNA BE, KID?

WHAT'S IT GONNA BE?

HERE'S THE GAME...

SEE, I CUT ONE OF THESE LINES AND ONE OF YOU GETS CRUSHED UNDER A *TON* OF PAPERWORK.

TWO THOUSAND POUNDS TO BE EXACT.

THE LIGHTS...

HE'S HERE!

NO PSYCHOLOGY. NO REVERSE LOGIC.

HE CAN'T WIN BY PLAYING DENT'S GAME.

HE HAS TO MAKE IT HIS GAME

HIS RULES.

GET THE LIGHTS BACK ON! SOMEBODY GET THE LIGHTS!

NO GUESSING. NO PLAYING.

THERE YOU ARE, YOU FLYING... RAT!

SECOND TIME AROUND, BATMAN!

YOU REMEMBER HOW WE PLAY?

I FLIP A COIN AND SOMEBODY DIES. WILL IT BE THE LATEST BOY WONDER? OR WILL IT BE THE TWO-TIME LOSER?

WHO WILL LADY LUCK SMILE UPON?

PING

TING

THAT DOESN'T SOLVE ANYTHING, RAT! THE COIN'S STILL IN PLAY.

ONE OF THE SIDES WILL TELL THE STORY!

THIS BATMAN'S GONNA RESCUE US, RIGHT?

THAT'S WHAT HE'S GONNA DO, RIGHT? HE WOULDN'T JUST TAKE OFF, HUH?

COOL YOUR PIPES, KENT. HE'S GOT A *PLAN.*

I HOPE THAT'S *TRUE*, DICK.

HA!

YOU'RE EITHER LUCKY OR YOU'RE *DEAD!* SAY *TWO*-DE-LOO, ROBIN!

UH?

DENT'S IS A LOSER'S GAME.

CHANGE THE RULES.

YOU'RE CHEATING!

THAT MEANS YOU ALL DIE, RAT!

HE HAS TO MAKE THE GAME HIS OWN.

CHEATER!

MAKE THE ODDS BEND TO HIS FAVOR.

PLAY TO WIN.

NO WALKING AWAY. NO TIME-OUT.

LIVES IN THE BALANCE AND SECONDS ON THE CLOCK.

NOOOOO...

NO!

GAME OVER.

OFF.
ON.
OFF.
ON.
OFF.
ON.
WE GOT THE FIRE UNDER CONTROL. BUT A LOT OF RECORDS WERE DESTROYED.
DON'T WORRY. THEY'LL MAKE *MORE*.
AIN'T *THAT* THE TRUTH?
WELL, YOU GOT *SOMETHING* HARDLY *ANY* OF US EVER GET. A SECOND SHOT.
YOU USED YOUR *FIRST* EXPERIENCE WITH TWO-FACE AS A GUIDE TO SHUTTING HIM DOWN.
I WISH IT MADE ME *FEEL* BETTER.
FUNNY THING IS... JUST AS I'M GETTING *GOOD* AT THIS...
...I KNOW I'M GOING TO HAVE TO GIVE IT *UP*.
PRODIGAL CONTINUES IN ROBIN 12!

Cover art by TOM GRUMMETT AND RAY KRYSSING

BULLIES

SO, YOU ESCAPED FROM THE FEDERAL LOCK-UP AND WENT ON A SIX-STATE CRIME SPREE KILLING A DOZEN COPS ON THE WAY.

WELL, THE PARTY ENDS HERE, GUYS.

I GOT YER PARTY, JERKIMER!

WHATTA WUSSY!

CHUCK DIXON
STORY
PHIL JIMENEZ
PENCILS
JOHN STOKES
INKER
ADRIENNE ROY
COLORIST
ALBERT DE GUZMAN
LETTERER
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL
ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNY O'NEIL
EDITOR

WE CAN DO THIS THE EASY WAY OR THE HARD WAY.

HE SAID THAT IN THE LAST MOVIE!

THE LAST TWO MOVIES!

I WANT MY MONEY BACK!

IT'S LIKE WATCHIN' A RERUN! HA HA HA!

I'M GOING TO SAY SOMETHING TO THEM, ARIANA.

DON'T. IT'S ALMOST OVER, TIM.

IT'LL BE ALL RIGHT.

COULD YOU GUYS HOLD IT DOWN A LITTLE? THERE'RE OTHER PEOPLE HERE, YOU KNOW.

YOU...

TIM!

I COULD TAKE THEM AND NOT WORK UP A SWEAT.

I COULD MOVE ON THEM SO FAST THEIR NEXT MEMORY WOULD BE AN EMERGENCY ROOM.

YEAH. ROBIN COULD.

BUT TIM DRAKE CAN'T.

TIM DRAKE HAS TO TAKE IT.

TIM! DON'T!

UHH...

YOU MADE A BIG, BIG MISTAKE, "TIMMY."

WE'LL SEE YOU OUTSIDE, "TIMBO."

TIM DRAKE'S NO BOY WONDER.

's Pizza

I DON'T SEE THEM.

SEE WHO, ARI?

THE MACHO ACT IS *VERY* CUTE, TIM. YOU KNOW EX--

WELL, "TIMMY." HOW'D YOU LIKE THE *MOVIE*?

MAN...

WAS IT A THUMBS UP OR THUMBS DOWN, "TIMBO"?

LOOK, WHY DON'T WE CALL IT EVEN AND JUST WALK AWAY?

OH, WE'LL WALK AWAY, "TIMMY."

I CAN TAKE A HIT.

I CAN ROLL WITH THE PUNCH.

UNNH!

OW!

THEY'RE NOT THAT GOOD. CLUMSY BRAWLERS.

SHOULD GET AWAY WITH JUST A FEW LIGHT BRUISES IF I PLAY IT RIGHT.

THEN IT ALL GETS TORQUED UP A NOTCH.

GEDDOFF ME!

OOH!

LEAVE HER-- UH!

IT'S AN OLD STORY.

SHAMED IN FRONT OF MY GIRL.

I CAN FEEL HER EYES ON ME.

HURTS MORE THAN ANY KICK OR PUNCH.

HOLD IT IN.

HOLD IT BACK.

THE SECRET'S THE IMPORTANT THING.

THE SECRET.

WHAT'S GOING ON OVER THERE?

UH...

TIM... TIM...?

I'M ALL RIGHT... ARIANA...

DAMN KIDS.

MAYBE YOU SHOULD GO TO THE EMERGENCY WARD.

IT'S OKAY, MRS. DZERCHENKO. I'VE HAD WORSE.

DOES IT HURT, TIM?

IT'LL HURT WORSE IN THE MORNING.

ANIMALS! THE STREETS ARE FULL OF ANIMALS!

YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO *PROTECT* OUR NIECE! WHO *KNOWS* WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED?

UNCLE VARI!

LET'S LEAVE THEM ALONE, VARI.

YOU MUST STAND *UP* TO ANIMALS!

THAT'S *ENOUGH.*

YOUR UNCLE'S *RIGHT*, ARI. WHAT IF THE POLICE *HADN'T* COME?

I KNOW SOMETHING THAT WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER.

IT DOESN'T.

IT JUST MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A HEEL.

PRETTY BAD.

YOU SURE YOU WANT TO GO OUT TONIGHT?

I'VE NEVER BEEN MORE SURE, DICK.

YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A LITTLE PAYBACK, RIGHT?

TAKE OUT ON SOME LOWLIFE THUG WHAT YOU FEEL TOWARDS THOSE GUYS WHO HANDED YOU A BEATING?

YEAH... I GUESS I AM.

I CAN RELATE.

MAYBE THIS WILL DO THE TRICK.

SOME ADRENALINE TO WASH THIS SICK FEELING AWAY.

DICK'S WATCHING ME, GAUGING MY REACTIONS.

HE'S NOT AS JUDGMENTAL AS BRUCE WOULD BE.

BUT HE'S KEEPING AN EYE ON ME.

THERE'S ENOUGH ACTION TONIGHT.

BUT NOTHING SPECIAL.

NOTHING CHALLENGING.

ANOTHER NIGHT IN GOTHAM.

IT USUALLY MAKES ME FEEL BETTER TO GET INTO THE ACTION.

MAKES ME FORGET MY PROBLEMS.

WELL?

YOU GOT A FEW LICKS IN. GOT YOUR BLOOD UP.

IT DIDN'T HELP.

I CAN DO THIS EVERY NIGHT AND IT WOULDN'T CHANGE ANYTHING. GETTING PAYBACK AS *ROBIN* ISN'T THE SAME THING.

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

TIM DRAKE DOESN'T GET ANYTHING OUT OF IT. *HE* STILL LOOKS LIKE A WEENIE IN FRONT OF HIS GIRLFRIEND.

ROBIN CAN TAKE DOWN EVERY SKELL IN GOTHAM AND *THAT* WON'T CHANGE.

HM.

I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN. I ALWAYS FELT BAD FOR BRUCE HAVING TO PUT ON THE BERNIE WOOSTER BIT. THAT *HAS* TO HURT.

MAYBE *THAT'S* WHY I NEVER TRIED TOO HARD TO BE DICK GRAYSON.

BUT YOU'RE NOT THE KIND TO TAKE *ANY*THING EASY, ARE YOU, TIM?

COME ON, SLUG-A-BED!

NOT AGAIN.

MRS. McILVAINE'S MAKING EGGS BENEDICT AND FRESH-SQUEEZED ORANGE JUICE.

YEAH?

COME ON, SON. TODAY'S THE DAY THE GYM EQUIPMENT ARRIVES.

GYM EQUIPMENT?

I NEED YOUR HELP, TIM. SO MOVE IT.

SEEMS LIKE DAD ISN'T GOING TO SPEND ONE MORE MINUTE AS AN INVALID.

SINCE HE CAME BACK FROM ENGLAND HE'S BEEN SO...

...ALIVE!

THERE'S NO REASON WHY I CAN'T GET BACK TO ONE HUNDRED PERCENT, TIM, WITH THE RIGHT PHYSICAL THERAPY AND SOME HARD WORK.

IT'S SOMETHING WE CAN DO TOGETHER, SON. A FEW HOURS IN THE GYM WOULDN'T HURT YOU EITHER.

HELP YOU LOSE YOUR BABY FAT.

DAD, I DON'T HAVE ANY...

ALL THIS TOGETHERNESS IS REALLY PUTTING A GLITCH IN MY ROBIN ACTIVITIES.

HAVE TO LOOK GOOD FOR THE GIRLS, RIGHT?

I CAN'T WAIT TO GET STARTED.

UH... ME NEITHER.

FOR THE FIRST MONTH OR SO I'VE HIRED A PHYSICAL THERAPIST. YOU KNOW, TO GET ME ON THE RIGHT ROAD.

TO KEEP ME ON THE TRAINING PROGRAM.

I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU SO PUMPED ABOUT THIS, DAD.

CAN'T JUST SIT AROUND FEELING SORRY FOR MYSELF, CAN I?

WELL--

AND HERE SHE IS!

SHE?

TIM, MEET DANA WINTERS. THIS IS MY SON, TIM, DANA.

MR. DRAKE, I HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE OLD ENOUGH TO HAVE A TEENAGE SON.

UH... HI.

...AND SHE LOOKS LIKE A SUPER MODEL.

HM. I MIGHT HAVE TO FIND AN EXCUSE TO *DROP IN* TO THE DRAKE HOUSE, TIM.

HE DIDN'T EVEN *NOTICE* MY BRUISES.

WELL, AT LEAST DANA IS TAKING DAD'S MIND OFF THINKING OF NEW HOBBIES WE CAN SHARE.

JUST IN TIME TOO. I'VE GOT *OTHER* THINGS TO DO WITH MY NIGHTS.

DOES THAT MEAN THINGS ARE GOING SMOOTHER BETWEEN YOU AND ARIANA?

NOT REALLY.

EVERY TIME I THINK WE'RE FINALLY GETTING ALONG, *SOMETHING* HAPPENS TO CHANGE ALL THAT.

WELCOME TO THE OPPOSITE SEX, TIM.

LOOK AT *YOU* WITH THE LAUNDRY. YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE SOME WOMAN HAPPY SOMEDAY.

WELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU LEARNED TO FOLD A TOWEL.

HEY!

I CAN'T DO *EVERYTHING* AROUND HERE UNTIL ALFRED GETS BACK.

[YOU ARE THE OWNER HERE?*]

[I AM VARI DZERCHENKO.]

*TRANSLATED FROM UKRAINIAN.

[WE ARE FROM THE--]

[THE MOLINA. YOU ARE GANGSTERS. I KNOW YOUR KIND.]

[THEN YOU KNOW WHY WE ARE HERE.]

[AND I KNOW YOU CAN GO TO HELL.]

[I CAME TO AMERICA TO GET *AWAY* FROM BANDITS LIKE YOU. YOU WILL NOT GET A *DOLLAR* IN PROTECTION MONEY FROM ME.]

[YOU WILL PAY! *EVERYONE* PAYS!]

[IF YOU DO NOT, THEN YOU WILL NOT DO BUSINESS HERE!]

NO... NOT AGAIN.

NO!

[FOOL!]

UNNH!

[EVERYONE PAYS!]

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM

VARI!

THEY COULD HAVE KILLED YOU.

THEY WEREN'T TRYING?

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, NATALIA.

LOOK AFTER ARIANA.

ARIANA...

ARIANA!

DAD'S WORN OUT FROM HIS FIRST DAY OF TRAINING. I THINK IT'S EYESTRAIN.

BUT IT GIVES ME A CHANCE TO GO DOWNTOWN AND SURPRISE ARI.

WELL, LOOK WHO IT IS...

THE LITTLE MOVIE CRITIC.

LIKE THE MAN SAID, "THE PARTY ENDS HERE!"

NOT LIKE *LAST* TIME, TIMBO. NO COPS. NO GIRLFRIEND.

NO WITNESSES.

YOU GUYS *SURE* YOU WANT TO DO THIS?

OH, WE'RE *SHUHHHHH!*

AGHK!

NNG!

UNNNH!

KLAK

UK!

YOU GUYS SHOULD BE GLAD THIS DIDN'T END THE SAME WAY AS *LAST* TIME.

I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU HATE *SEQUELS*.

UHHHHHHHH

OOOOOHHHHH...

WELL, THINGS ARE LOOKING UP.

FOR A FEW MINUTES ANYWAY.

TIM?

ARI...

ARI, I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED BUT...

IT'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, ARI. EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT.

EVEN IF I HAVE TO MAKE IT THAT WAY.

EVEN IF ROBIN HAS TO PROTECT HER.

WE WILL AVOID THE DIFFICULTY OF DIALECTS AND SPEAK IN ENGLISH, NO?

I AM COMFORTABLE WITH THAT.

AS AM I.

IT IS RIGHT THAT WE THREE MEET AND SHARE DRINK. A *TROIKA*, EH?

TOGETHER WE CAN RULE GOTHAM'S UNDERWORLD. A *UNION* OF CRIMINALS.

FROM EACH ACCORDING TO HIS ABILITIES, TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS *GREED*, DEAR COSSACK.

THE *APPARATCHIKS* THAT KEPT THE WORLD'S LARGEST NATION UNDER A PALL OF FEAR SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO THE SAME HERE.

WOULD YOU AGREE, ROMANA?

AS YOU SAY, COLONEL VEGA. TOGETHER WE COMMAND THE MOST DISCIPLINED CELL OF THE *MOLINA*.

VETERANS TOUGHENED BY WAR IN THE AFGHAN, THUGS HARDENED BY LIFE IN THE GULAGS.

HERE IS TO OUR SUCCESS IN FILLING THE VOID LEFT BY THE RECENT PASSING OF SO MANY OF GOTHAM'S CRIME CZARS.

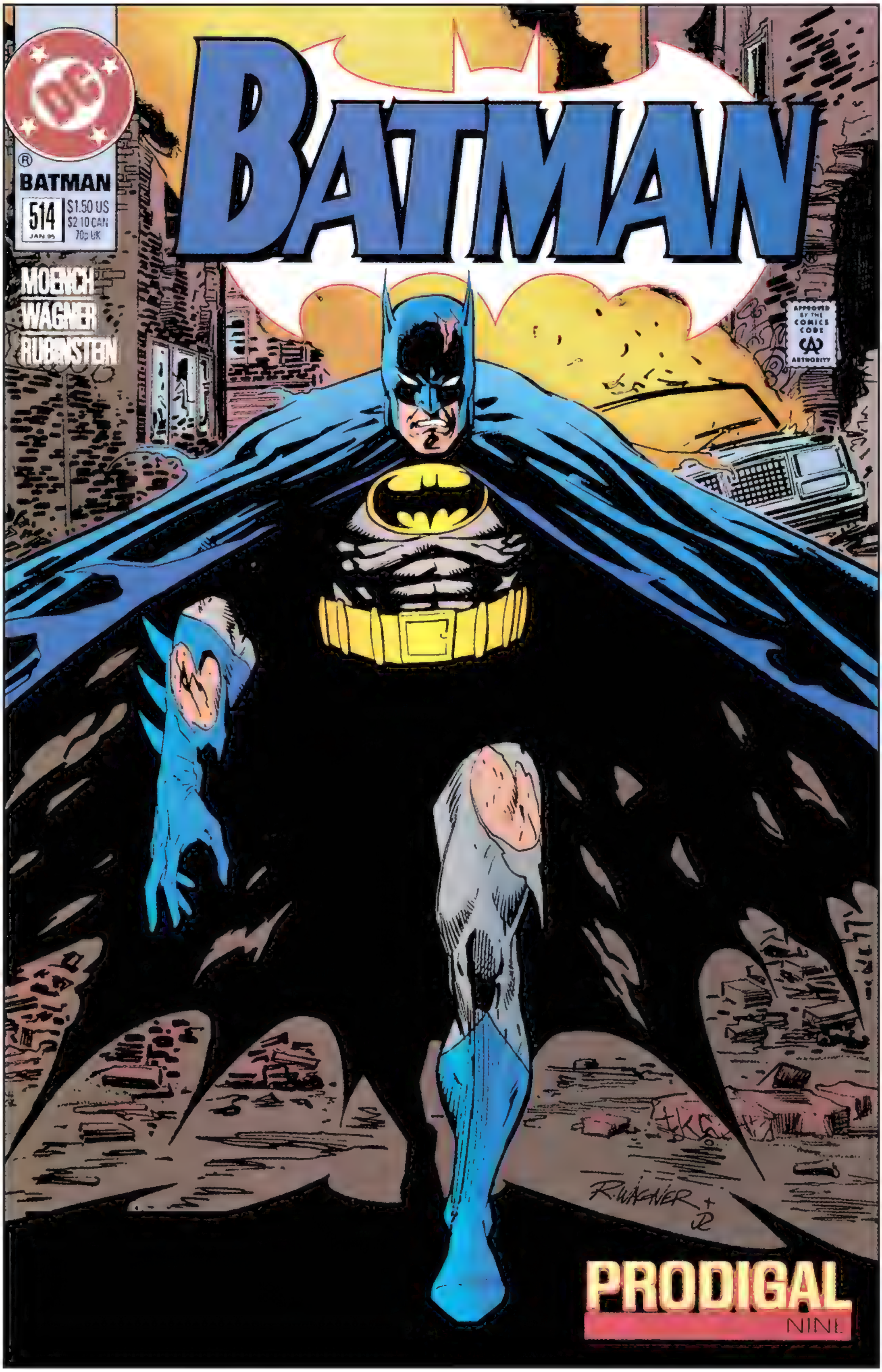
AND TO *MOUNTAINS* OF AMERICAN DOLLARS.

AND THE *FRUITS* OF CAPITALISM.

AND DRINKING WE SHOULD BE TO ONE OTHER VOW...

"...THE DEATHS OF THE CREATURES BATMAN AND ROBIN!"

Cover art by **TOM GRUMMETT** and **RAY KRYSSING**



ONE NIGHT in the WAR ZONE

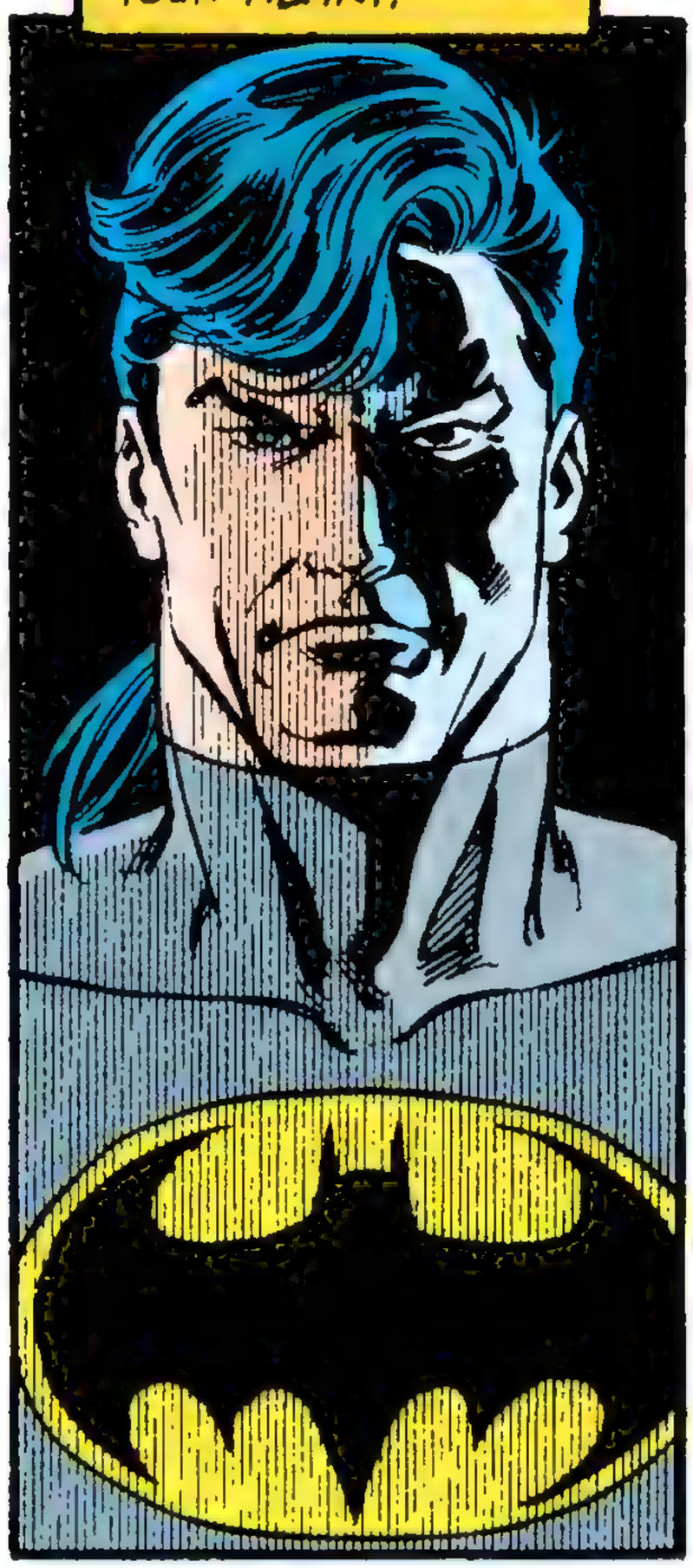
I'M THE BATMAN, BUT THE BATMAN IS NOT ME.

DICK GRAYSON, ROBIN, NIGHTWING, BATMAN - ALL THE SAME, ALL DIFFERENT, ALL ME... BUT NOT QUITE.

ROBIN'S SKIN, SHED LONG AGO, IS NOW WORN BY ANOTHER - AND BEING BATMAN IS ONLY TEMPORARY, MAYBE ANOTHER MONTH, MAYBE ANOTHER NIGHT

STILL, IT ONLY TAKES A SECOND TO LOSE IT ALL...

AND IT TAKES GUTS TO WEAR A BAT OVER YOUR HEART.



DOUG MOENCH
WRITER

RON WAGNER · JOE RUBINSTEIN
ARTISTS

ADRIENNE ROY · KEN BRUZENAK · JORDAN B. GORFINKEL
COLORIST LETTERER ASSISTANT EDITOR

DENNIS O'NEIL · BATMAN CREATED BY
EDITOR BOB KANE

GOT IT YET?

I THINK SO, DICK--ALTHOUGH IT SURE WASN'T EASY HACKIN' THROUGH ALL THE GARBAGE AND GARBLE.

TWO-FACE WORKED A REAL NUMBER ON THE PENAL SYSTEM'S MASTER COMPUTER.

tek

THE FOUL-UPS CAUSED DOZENS OF CONS TO BE PREMATURELY RELEASED.

GORDON'S PEOPLE CAN TRACK DOWN AND NAIL MOST OF THEM...

...BUT THESE ARE THE THREE WORST ONES STILL AT LARGE.. LIFERS WITHOUT POSSIBILITY OF PAROLE...

Shrrreepp

...AND NEVER ELIGIBLE FOR RELEASE.

THEN THESE ARE THE ONES DEMANDING BATMAN'S ATTENTION.

LIKE YOU SAID, DICK, TWO-FACE HIMSELF IS DOWN-BUT NOW IT'S TIME TO CLEAN UP HIS MESS.

IT NEVER ENDS...

NOT IN MY EXPERIENCE... BUT THEN, YOU'VE HAD MORE.

NOT IN MANKIND'S EXPERIENCE.

TELL ME ABOUT THESE THREE.

ALL MURDERERS, OBVIOUSLY, BUT EACH ONE DOES HAVE A UNIQUE TWIST...

STRAKE, BONAVENTURE

McCONE, JOHN

CHEUNG, HSUI

"STRAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, SPECIALIZES IN DRUGS--SOMETIMES WITH A PARTNER NAMED GEORGE SAMSON."

EVENIN', GEORGE...

WH--? STRAKE?! BUT H-HOW...?

MAN, YOU LIKE TO SCARE THE NINTH LIFE OUTTA ME...

LONG TIME NO SEE, GEORGE--BUT THEN, YOU NEVER EXPECTED TO SEE ME AGAIN... DID YOU?

WELL, I...

GOT SOMETHIN' ON FOR TONIGHT, GEORGE?

NAW, I... I DON'T DO THAT NO MORE, STRAKE...

TOO DANGEROUS.

YEAH, COULD PUT A BODY AWAY FOR LIFE, HUH, GEORGE...?

...OR SIX FEET UNDER... FOR DEATH.

Y-YEAH...

SO WHATCHA GOT HERE, GEORGE?

AW, UH... TH-THAT'S NOTHIN', STRAKE...

NOTHIN', HUH? THAT'S RIGHT, GEORGE, I FORGOT.

OLD DAYS, YOU ALWAYS DID LIKE TO CARRY NOTHIN' FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE ALL THE WAY TO HERE AT MIDNIGHT...

...DIDN'T YA?

AND THE SECOND NAME--McCONE?

AN ENFORCER FOR TOUGH TONY BRESSI'S MOB--A SOLDIER MADE TEN TIMES OVER...

"IT'S A GOOD BET HE'S GOT A MAD-ON FOR VINCE CASTLE, THE GUY WHO ROLLED OVER AND GOT HIM SENT AWAY."

YOU McCONE?

DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU GOT FOR ME.

HEY, WHEN IT'S A FAVOR FOR A FRIEND OF BIG TONY, REST HIS SOUL...

KITCH

KITCH

...YOU GET TO TAKE YOUR PICK.

THANKS...

...BUT YOU NEEDN'T HAVE *BOTHERED* WITH THE *SMALL* CHOICES.

CASTLE HIMSELF WAS SUSPECTED OF VARIOUS CRIMES, INCLUDING *MURDER*, BUT THERE WAS NEVER ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO *STICK*--

-AND THE D.A.'S OFFICE NO DOUBT *STOPPED LOOKING HARD* AFTER CASTLE MADE HIS DEAL TO PUT McCONE *AWAY*.

AND *CHEUNG*?

HE LEFT CHINATOWN AT *FIFTEEN*-- WITH THREE DIFFERENT GANGLORDS AFTER HIS *HEAD*.

RELOCATED AND SET UP A STRING OF BACK ROOM *GAMBLING DENS*-- SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH FOR HIM TO TAKE ON *FIVE PARTNERS*.

THEY STARTED RIPPING HIM OFF, *SKIMMING* THE TAKES...

IT NEVER ENDS, NOT FOR THE BATMAN.

"HE WORKED HIS WAY THROUGH THREE OF THE FIVE BEFORE HE WAS *CAUGHT*, KILLING EACH OF THE THREE HAND-TO-HAND WITH A DIFFERENT *MARTIAL ARTS WEAPON*."

I TELL YA, THE WORD'S *OUT*-HE'S *FREE*!

HEY, THEY AIN'T *NEVER* LETTIN' CHEUNG OUT, ALL *RIGHT*?

BUT THEY *DID!* THE *GREEK* SEEN HIM-- *TODAY*- OVER ON THE *STRAND* --AN' HE WAS ASKIN' ABOUT *US!*

THE GREEK'S *FULL* OF IT!

NOW GET OUTTA MY WAY BEFORE I GIVE YA SOME MAD MONKEY *KUNG FU!*

BUT--

JUST *SHUT UP* AND STOP MAKIN' ME *TWITCHY*--

"CHELING'S ON ICE *FOREVER!*"

THE ADDRESSES UNDER EACH NAME ARE LAST KNOWN *RESIDENCES*, PLACES OF *HANG-OUT*, ADDRESSES OF KNOWN *ASSOCIATES*...

AND EVERY LAST ADDRESS... IS IN *BATTERGATE.*

DO THEY STILL CALL THAT AREA "THE *WAR ZONE*"?

THE *COPS* DO-- BUT *BRUCE* CALLS IT *HELL.*

ALL *THREE* OF THEM-- IN THE *WAR ZONE.*

HEY, WHAT DO YOU *EXPECT* FOR GUYS LIKE THAT?

I DIDN'T EXPECT *ANYTHING*, TIM, BUT WHAT I'VE *GOT* IS A DIRTY JOB.

WE'RE GOIN' IN *NOW?*

YOU'VE GOT *SCHOOL* AND YOUR *FATHER* TO WORRY ABOUT--BETTER GRAB WHATEVER SLEEP YOU *CAN.*

LEAVING YOU TO ENTER THE WAR ZONE ALONE?

NO.. WITH THE BATMAN RIDING ON MY BACK...

...AND LET'S HOPE THIS CAPE'S WORTH AT LEAST A REGIMENT.

BOUND TO BE A LONG NIGHT, MAYBE LONG ENOUGH TO CURSE THE SUN FOR SETTING.

BUT WHY SHOULD THIS NIGHT FEEL SO MUCH WORSE?

WHY WAS IT SUCH AN EFFORT TO DON THE CAPE AND COWL--TO LEAVE THE CAVE? WHY DOES IT FEEL LIKE IT SHOULD BE FINISHED?

DID I PUT THE BAT OVER MY HEART JUST TO TEST MYSELF--TO GET THE MONKEY OF TWO-FACE OFF MY BACK?

NO--I DID IT BECAUSE BRUCE ASKED ME, BECAUSE HE NEEDED ME.

I GAVE MY WORD, AND THAT KIND OF PROMISE--NO MATTER HOW LONG THE NIGHT--STICKS FOR THE DURATION.

NOW THAT TWO-FACE IS DOWN, I MAY NOT NEED, OR WANT, THE BAT...

...BUT I'VE GOT TO PUT MY HEART INTO IT.

HE'S OUT THERE, I KNOW IT, HUNTIN' FOR--

HEY, WILL YOU RELAX AWREADY?

I TOLE YA--CHEUNG AIN'T NEVER COMIN'--

--HERE?

:HUUUHH:

CHUT

SMACK

PKT

FLLT

LLT

ONE TO GO.

THE FRONT LINE OF THE WAR ZONE--EVEN WORSE THAN I REMEMBER IT.

BUT THEN, IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I WAS MERELY ROBIN...

...AND THESE DAYS, THEY'RE ACTUALLY TALKING ABOUT FENCING OFF THE SURROUNDING AREAS WITH CHECKPOINTS AND RAZOR-WIRE.

IF ONLY IT WERE THAT EASY...

...TO ACHIEVE TRUE SECURITY.

BING BONG

YES...?

YOU MUST BE VINCE CASTLE'S WIFE.

Y-YES ...?

I'M A FRIEND OF VINCE'S, MRS. CASTLE-- NAME'S McCONE.

I'VE GOT SOMETHING FOR--

McCONE--?! N-NO... VINCE SAID TO NEVER--

BNUMPT

SPLAT

WHERE IS HE?

P-PLEASE... HE...H-HE'S NOT HERE...

THEN I GUESS YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO IMPROVE YOUR HOSPITALITY, MRS. CASTLE...

...WHILE WE WAIT FOR HUBBY TO GET HOME.

LIKE I SAID...

...I GOT SOMETHIN' FOR HIM.

SLAM

BRUCE IS RIGHT-- IT IS HELL.

AND TIME TO ENTER IT.

MIGHT AS WELL HUNT THE DEMONS IN THE ORDER OF TIM'S LIST...

...MAKING STRAKE FIRST.

SHIKT

SLT

NH-NHN...

BLADE-LICKIN' GOOD, GEORGE...

YOU HOLDIN' OUT ON ME.

GOT IT BACKWARDS, GEORGE...

SHIK

N-NO... I... I WAS JUST TALKIN', STRAKE!

I'LL CUT YOU IN, MAN, HONEST!

I'LL CUT IN YOU.

IF YOU CAN CALL IT LUCK, IT MAY BE WITH ME--TWO BAD DUDES GOING INTO A PAWN SHOP WELL AFTER HOURS...

...THE SAME PAWN SHOP TIM'S PRINTOUT PEGS AS A FRONT FOR STRAKE'S FORMER DRUG-DEALING.

IN A WAR ZONE OF CREEPS AND CRIMINALS, IT SEEMS...

...OLD HAUNTS NEVER DIE.

STRAKE-T!

BACK IN BUSINESS, BOYS, NOW THAT GEOREE HERE JUST RETIRED.

AN' I SURE HOPE HE DID A GOOD JOB FILLIN' IN FOR ME...

...CUZ I HATE TO THINK O' YOU DROOLIN' OVER THIS MERCHANDISE WITH NOTHIN' BUT SHORT CASH.

EASY, STRAKE, DON'T MATTER IF IT'S YOU OR GEORGE, WE GOT..

FREEZE!

WH--?!

THRAKK

HWOKK

RRRRDT

SKRRANKT

KUNGK

CHAT

SHUMP

SPASH

PLAFT

TSSSSSS

POLICE? PAWN SHOP ON HARKINS IN THE WAR ZONE- DRUGS AND MURDER.

HURRY, BUT YOU CAN GO IN EASY--THE PERPETRATORS ARE ALL DOWN.

UNDERSTOOD, BUT WHO IS-

:klik:

NOW McCONE- AND A SHIFT FROM OLD HAUNTS...

...TO UNFINISHED VENGEANCE.

WELL, WELL, A CERTAIN SCRAPING AT THE FRONT DOOR-- MUCH LIKE A KEY BEING INSERTED INTO A LOCK...

NO-! GET AWAY!! DON'T COME IN!!

BAM BAM

RUN, MARGIE!!

MARGIE? WHO'S MÄR-

HHH

BAM BAM

WHO THE--?!

SWAKK

I...I THOUGHT YOU...YOU WERE MY DAUGHTER, MARGIE...

HER DAUGHTER?! BUT THEN, WHERE IS--

BINAKT

NO, VINCE! HE SAVED ME!

CASTLE...

SHRIIIP

...HIDING IN THE CLOSET THE WHOLE TIME.

IT NEVER ENDS.

KUNCH

BUT NOW, IF HIS WIFE'S WILLING TO TELL THE TRUTH AND TESTIFY...

...EVEN A BLIND D.A. GETS TO BAG THEM BOTH.

GO TO A NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE AND CALL THE POLICE, MRS. CASTLE.

I'LL WAIT OUTSIDE UNTIL THEY GET HERE.

I...I... YYES...

PROBABLY A GREAT MARRIAGE THE CASTLES HAVE...BUT THEN, I MESSED UP WITH KORY **MYSELF.**

BLEW IT WITH THE **TITANS**... LOST MY WAY AS **NIGHTWING.**

I'M TOO OLD TO BE **ROBIN**...

...AND BEING THE **BATMAN** ON A GRIM TOUR LIKE THIS CERTAINLY ISN'T ME

BUT WHAT **IS?** WHAT **AM** I? --OTHER THAN A RELUC-TANT GRUNT IN A FOREIGN **WAR ZONE**...

AT LEAST THE **CAVALRY'S** HERE TO MOP UP **THIS** SKIRMISH.

POLICE

TIME FOR **CHEUNG**... BUT **MAN**, DO I HATE MARTIAL ARTS GUYS.

THE LAST OF THE THREE ADDRESSES LISTED FOR CHEUNG--AND EVEN **LESS** PROMISING THAN THE **FIRST TWO**...

LUCK WAS BOUND TO RUN OUT ON ME-- NO ONE HERE FOR A **LONG** TIME.

MAYBE THE HEAT'S OFF IN **CHINATOWN** BY NOW...

MAYBE CHEUNG NEVER EVEN CAME BACK TO THE WAR ZONE.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK CHEUNG'LL COME *HERE?*

IT'S WHERE HE *STARTED* IN BATTERGATE - WHERE HE *ALWAYS* GOES WHEN THERE'S TROUBLE.

TOLD ME ONCE HE KEEPS A *STASH* HERE - *MONEY, WEAPONS...*

"...ALTHOUGH I AIN'T NEVER *FOUND* IT--AND BELIEVE ME, I'VE *LOOKED PLENTY.*"

THERE!

BWAK!

BAM BAM

YEEAH

SHOT!

NO--IT IS HIM...BUT WAGING A WAR OF HIS OWN WITH OTHERS...

HUH?! HOW'D HE GET WAY OVER HERE?!

JUST DO HIM!!

BAMM

WAKT

...MAKING FOR STRANGE ALLIES.

HWOKK

SHRRRUK

AT LEAST TEMPORARILY.

SHRRRRRT

AND NONE TO GO... EXCEPT YOU.

I'VE HAD ENOUGH FOR ONE NIGHT.

YOU'RE NOT DEAD YET.

NO... BUT THOU SHALT NOT-

STOKT

BRATCH

-KILL!

WROKT

CAME IN AFTER THREE AND GOT TEN, A LOT MORE THAN I BARGAINED FOR.

BUT THE PEACE TALKS BLEW UP A LONG TIME AGO-AND YOU DON'T MAKE DEALS IN A WAR ZONE...

AT LEAST I'M STILL ALIVE, TWO HOURS SHY OF DAWN.

LONG NIGHT BY ANY MEASURE, AND A RELIEF TO END IT EARLY. TRADE WAR ZONE FOR MANOR AND-

BLAM BLAM BLAM

EEEEEEEEEE

THREE SHOTS ECHOING THROUGH CANYONS OF CRUMBLED BRICK.

A DISTANT SCREAM FROM SOME UPPER FLOOR IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.

THE THREE WORST HAVE BEEN RECAPTURED, THE PRE-TWO-FACE STATUS QUO RESTORED... BUT THERE ARE NEW CRIMES EVERY MINUTE, IN EVERY DIRECTION.

IT NEVER STOPS, NEVER ENDS-- AND IF AN ENTIRE POLICE FORCE CAN BECOME OVER-WHELMED AND DEMORALIZED, HOW DOES ONE MAN, ALONE IN AN ETERNAL NIGHT OF EVIL AND VIOLENCE, POSSIBLY COPE?

BY BEING DRIVEN, OBSESSED, MORE THAN A NORMAL MAN...

HRRRP

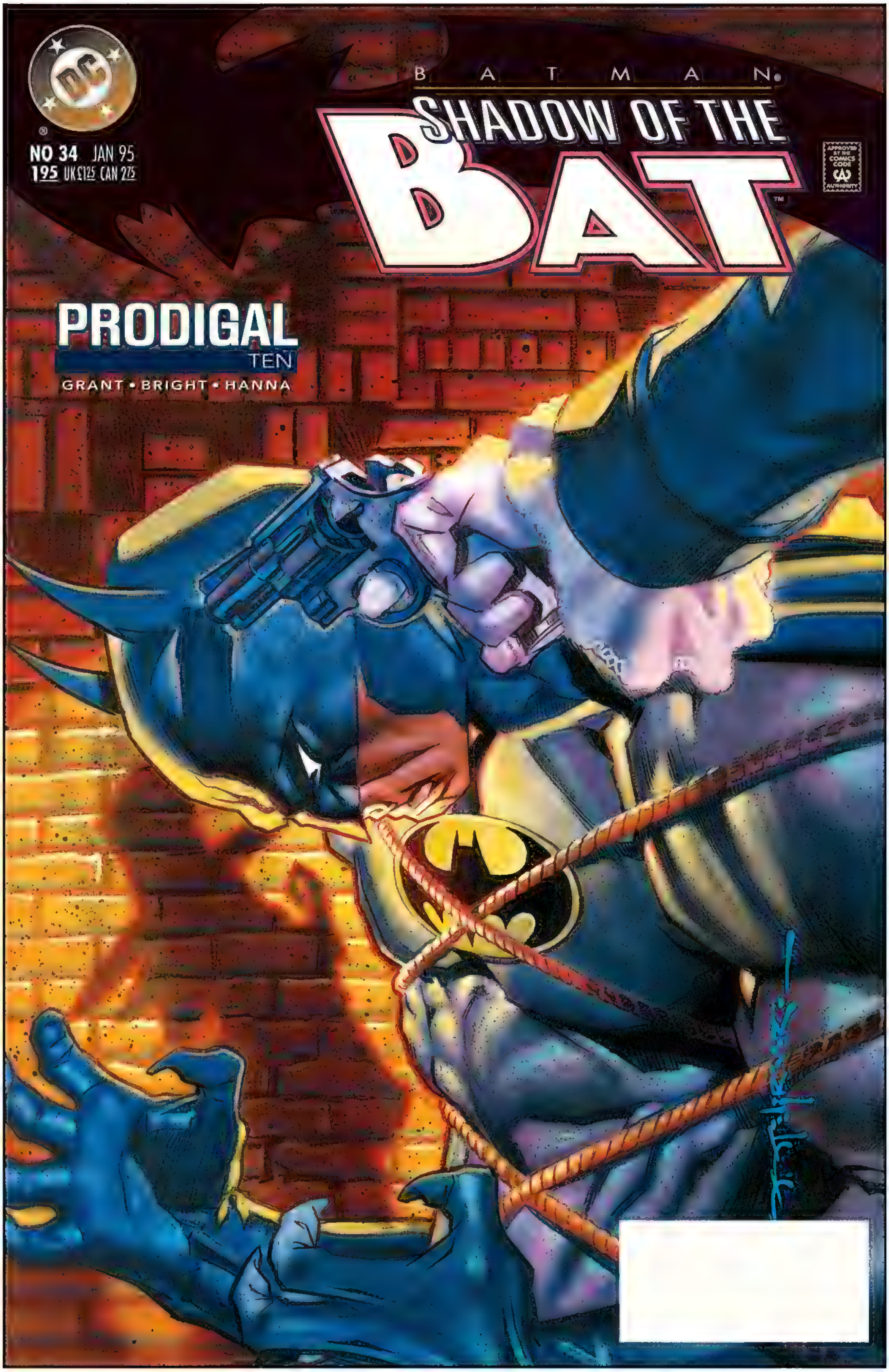
...AND A LOT MORE THAN I'M PREPARED, OR ABLE, TO BE.

THERE'S ONLY ONE BATMAN. IT WASN'T JEAN PAUL VALLEY, AND IT ISN'T ME.

COME BACK, BRUCE... THE NIGHT NEEDS YOU...

...AND ALL I CAN DO IS CURSE THE BAT ECLIPSING MY HEART.

Cover art by **BRIAN STELFREEZE**



ARE YOU BATMAN?

SLAP!

WHAT...?

ARE YOU BATMAN?

YES.

CHANGED YOUR COSTUME. REMEMBER ME?

THE TALLY MAN.

I'M A DEBT COLLECTOR.

WHAT DOES ANY OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

KLIK

YOU OWE ME.

NO ENTRY

ROAD CLOSED FOR REPAIRS

DETOUR

LUCKY!

SIX CHAMBERS-- BUT ONLY ONE BULLET IN THE GUN, SOONER OR LATER, IT'S GOING TO GET YOU!

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

BECAUSE I WANT TO SEE YOU **SWEAT**, BATMAN. I WANT TO SEE THE **FEAR** IN YOUR **EYES**--HEAR THE **TERROR** IN YOUR **VOICE**--TORTURE **YOU** THE WAY **YOU** TORTURED **ME**--

--BEFORE I **EXECUTE** YOU LIKE THE DOG YOU ARE!

I ... DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT--!

LIAR! I'VE WAITED A LONG TIME FOR THIS--LAIN AWAKE MANY PAINFUL NIGHTS, PLANNING HOW I'D PAY YOU BACK--

--AND YOU WALKED INTO MY TRAP LIKE A NOVICE!

HELP!

SOMEBODY-- PLEASE HELP!

HELP! HELP!

A SETUP TO DECOY ME HERE! BUT WHY--

AAAH!

SOMEBODY-- PLEASE HELP!

"I COULD HAVE KILLED YOU WITH THAT SHOT--BUT THERE'S NO SATISFACTION IN DEATH FROM A DISTANCE--"

--I WANT TO SEE YOU SUFFER... CLOSE UP!

HE MENTIONED A NEW COSTUME -- SO IT MUST HAVE BEEN *JEAN PAUL* HE WENT UP AGAINST. THAT WOULD EXPLAIN WHY THERE'S NO *RECORD* OF ANY TALLY MAN IN THE BATCAVE DATABANKS... RECORD-KEEPING WASN'T EXACTLY PAUL'S *STRONG* POINT!

IRONIC, IF *I* HAVE TO TAKE THE RAP FOR SOMETHING THAT MANIAC *PAUL* DID!

LOOK, PAL, YOU'RE MAKING A SERIOUS *MISTAKE*.

HOW ABOUT YOU CUT ME FREE AND WE'LL TALK THINGS OVER *RATIONALLY* BEFORE THIS GOES TOO FAR...?

DON'T PATRONIZE ME!

I *PRIDE* MYSELF ON MY RATIONALITY, BATMAN. EMOTION HAS *NO* PLACE IN MY LIFE!

I'VE KILLED *SIXTY-SIX* MEN -- AND ONLY THE VERY *FIRST* OF THEM WAS DUE TO ANGER. ALL THE REST WERE *CASH CONSIDERATIONS* ONLY--

--UNTIL *YOU* CROSSED MY PATH!

I'M TELLING YOU -- YOU'VE GOT THE *WRONG* MAN! I'VE NEVER *SEEN* YOU BEFORE!

LET ME REMIND YOU!

SEEMS THE *BUTO* FAMILY THOUGHT YOU'D CONSPIRED WITH THE *MAHOON BROTHERS* TO LURE JOEY BUTO TO HIS DEATH. THEY HIRED *ME* TO COLLECT THE DEBT.

"MIKE AND JOHNNY MAHOON WERE A *MILK RUN*--

"--BUT THE *BATMAN*--

"--NOW *THERE'S* A GUY WHO CAN *FIGHT!*"

6

"A LONG TIME SINCE I HAD A BATTLE LIKE THAT ONE.

"IT WAS TOTAL WAR, AND YOU BEAT ME FAIR AND SQUARE. I GOT NO COMPLAINTS ABOUT THAT.

"BUT THEN YOU WHACKED OUT ON ME-- CAME ON WITH ALL THAT CRAZY STUFF--"

I'M *NOT* YOUR PUNY BATMAN! I'M AZRAEL-- THE *PUNISHING* ANGEL--

--HARBINGER OF DEATH!

BEATING ME WASN'T ENOUGH, WAS IT? YOU RAT! YOU HAD TO BRAND ME--MARK ME, AS IF I'M YOUR ACCURSED PERSONAL PROPERTY!

THE BUTO FAMILY WERE ENEMIES OF BRUCE'S WHEN HE WAS BATMAN. LOOKS LIKE THIS TALLY MAN WENT AFTER PAUL THINKING HE WAS BRUCE--

--AND HE'S CAPTURED ME THINKING I'M PAUL! DOUBLY IRONIC!

BRAND YOU? PERSONAL PROPERTY?

DON'T PLAY THE INNOCENT! LOOK AT YOUR HANDIWORK--

--THE SIGN OF YOUR DAMNED BAT!

REMEMBER NOW, DO YOU? THAT'S WHY YOU'VE GOT TO SUFFER!

IF HE'D HAD ANY DOUBTS THAT IT WAS PAUL, THIS DISPELS THEM. THE MAN WAS EVEN MORE INSANE THAN THEY'D KNOWN!

STRUGGLE ALL YOU WANT. YOU WON'T BREAK THAT WIRE!

READY TO PLAY AGAIN?

LET'S SEE HOW YOUR LUCK'S HOLDING...!

HE'S COOL AND COLLECTED ON THE OUTSIDE--BUT INSIDE, I GET THE DEFINITE IMPRESSION HE'S SEETHING! MAYBE I CAN USE HIS EMOTION AGAINST HIM--

HE'S STARED DEATH IN THE FACE MORE TIMES THAN HE CAN COUNT. THESE THINGS HE KNOWS:

NEVER GIVE UP TILL YOU'RE BEAT.

NEVER DIE TILL YOU'RE DEAD.

SUCK IT IN, SOLDIER! THIS TIME THE REAPER--!

AS IF IN CORROBORATION OF THE TALLY MAN'S WORDS, THE YEARS ROLL AWAY AND HIS LIFE FLASHES BEFORE HIS EYES...

HIS BOYHOOD--
THE *CIRCUS* WHERE
HIS *PARENTS* STARRED--

--WHERE HIS
PARENTS *DIED*.

HE REMEMBERS THE FEELINGS AS
IF IT WAS HAPPENING TO HIM NOW
--*GRIEF, LOSS, BEWILDERMENT*
...AND A MOUNTING *FURY*.

HE COULD EASILY HAVE ENDED UP
ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE TRACKS
--IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR *BRUCE*
WAYNE.

BRUCE--HIS SURROGATE
FATHER, HIS *MENTOR*, HIS
FRIEND, HIS *PARTNER*.

BRUCE *MOLDED* HIM, CHANNELED
THAT FURY, THAT HUNGER FOR
REVENGE, INTO A FORCE FOR
GOOD--FOR WHAT'S *RIGHT*--

--FOR
JUSTICE.

THE NIGHT WIND IN HIS FACE--

--GOTHAM'S ELECTRIC INSANITY--

FOR YEARS THESE WERE HIS LIFE, AND HE WOULDN'T CHANGE IT NOW FOR THE WORLD. BUT THE DREAM WASN'T HIS--NOT DICK GRAYSON'S. HE WAS BUT A TOOL.

IT WAS *BRUCE WAYNE'S* DREAM THEY WERE LIVING OUT.

KLICK!

TWO DOWN. FOUR LEFT.

HOW DOES IT FEEL, BATMAN, KNOWING DEATH SPINS EVER CLOSER? NOT NICE!

ANYTHING BUT NICE--!

BUT HE *WON'T* DIE TILL HE'S DEAD!

A FEW MINUTES TO RECONSIDER, BEFORE THE NEXT...?

TALK TO ME, *TALLY MAN!* WHAT'S *YOUR* STORY? OBVIOUSLY YOU COULDN'T BECOME A *HERO* IN DUDS LIKE THAT--SO WHAT'S YOUR *PROBLEM?*

BANK FORECLOSE ON YOUR *DAD*, MAYBE?

WIFE RUN OFF WITH A *TAXMAN?*

LEAVE MY FAMILY OUT OF THIS!

OR MAYBE YOUR *MOM* WAS FRIGHTENED BY A *DEBT COLLECTOR...?*

SHUT UP!

THE TALLY MAN TURNS AWAY, LOST IN HIS OWN PAINFUL MEMORIES.

HE FLEXES AND UNFLEXES HIS MUSCLES, TRYING TO KEEP THEM SUPPLE, TRYING TO STAVE OFF THE COLD ACHE AND NUMBING PARALYSIS THAT'S STARTING TO CREEP UP FROM HIS FINGERS.

HE TASTES HIS OWN BLOOD, BLINKS IN AN EFFORT TO DISPEL THE RED MIST FLICKERING BEFORE HIS EYES. HE WONDERS IDLY--CONCUSSION...? --THEN JERKS HIMSELF BACK.

IF HE FAILS NOW, IT'S FOREVER.

HE GAVE UP THE ROLE OF PARTNER BECAUSE HIS MENTOR WAS AFRAID FOR HIM.

FAILURE.

13

HE LEFT COLLEGE AFTER A SEMESTER. WHO CARED IF HE HAD A GOOD EXCUSE?

FAILURE.

THEN HE THOUGHT HE'D CRACKED IT. NO MORE THE BATMAN'S PAWN, HE BECAME A MEMBER OF A TEAM--THE *TEEN TITANS*.

HE *BECAME* HIS OWN MAN-- *NIGHTWING*--AND *REVELED* IN IT--

TO NIGHTWING--

--OUR LEADER!

FOR A WHILE, HE FELT AS IF HE RULED THE WORLD, SUFFUSED WITH THAT FEELING THAT ONLY EVER COMES FROM BEING THE RIGHT MAN IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.

THEN SOMEHOW IT ALL REVERSED, AND HE WAS THE *WRONG* MAN.

EVEN *LOVE* WENT COLD ON HIM. THE ONE RELATIONSHIP HE THOUGHT HE COULD DEPEND ON DISSIPATED LIKE DUST ON THE GOTHAM WIND.

AND NOW HE'S *BATMAN*, THE CULMINATION OF A DREAM HE THOUGHT HE'D ALWAYS HAD. BUT IT'S BEEN WRONG. LIKE PAUL, HE WAS JUST FILLING IN FOR SOMEBODY ELSE--MARKING TIME TILL THE BOSS CAME HOME.

AND WHEN IT SEEMED TO BE GOING WELL--THIS.

FAILURE.

DEEP IN THOUGHT? MIND RUNNING LIKE ICEWATER OVER ALL THE POSSIBILITIES? RUNNING OUT OF IDEAS FOR ESCAPE?

REMEMBERING YOUR LIFE...?

I KNOW--I'VE BEEN THERE.

I CAME BACK.

I HAVE A FEELING--

--THIS TIME *YOU* WON'T.

FUNNY, HOW BRUCE'S WORDS COME TO HIM. "HOPE IS ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN THIS CITY AND DESPAIR.

"IF WE GIVE THEM *JUSTICE*, WE GIVE THEM *HOPE*."

NO, HE *WON'T* DIE IN ANOTHER MAN'S SHOES--!

KGHOW!

WAKK

HIS MUSCLES FEEL LIKE WATER, HIS ARMS LIKE LUMPS OF LEAD. BUT HE MOVES --

PITY YOU HAD TO SPOIL THINGS. I WAS ENJOYING THAT.

NOW YOU HAVE TO GO THE *QUICK* WAY!

STILL NEED THE BIG GUN, EH, TALLY MAN? WHAT'S WRONG --AFRAID I'D HURT YOU? IS THAT IT--

--MOMMA'S BOY?

KCHOW KCHOW KCHOW KCHOW KCHOW

YOU LEAVE MY MOTHER OUT OF THIS!

BRAKKABRAKKA

SPAK

GUNFIRE'S TURNED ON THE MACHINERY!

THRMMM

THE GUN CLICKS ON EMPTY--

I DON'T NEED BULLETS! YOU *OWE* ME, BATMAN!

AAAH!

AAAH!

NO--!

MY ONLY REGRET--

KCHANK!

--IS I DIDN'T MAKE YOU PAY!

KCHANK!

KCHANK!

THRMMM

AND MY ONLY REGRET--

CHK

--IS THAT I WAS *DUMB* ENOUGH TO FALL FOR YOUR RUSE IN THE FIRST PLACE!

THANK YOU-- A VERY DECENT ACTION.

THE DEBT YOU OWE IS *CANCELLED!*

WE CAN PART AS TEMPORARY INTRUDERS ON EACH OTHER'S LIVES.

NO CAN DO, TALLY MAN!

BY YOUR OWN ADMISSION, YOU'VE KILLED *DOZENS* OF PEOPLE. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE YOU IN!

SORRY--BUT I CAN'T ALLOW THAT!

I WASN'T ASKING FOR YOUR PERMISSION!

21

KNCH

SLAASH!

KLANK

EVERY MUSCLE'S SCREAMING, LEGS TURNING TO MARSHMALLOW. BUT HE'S *FINISHED* WITH FAILURE, AND SHEER WILLPOWER KEEPS HIM ON HIS FEET.

FAREWELL! NO DOUBT WE'LL MEET AGAIN!

SOONER THAN YOU THINK, CREEP!

JUST TO MAKE IT INTERESTING FOR YOU --

--GET OUT OF THAT!

AND COUNT YOURSELF FORTUNATE I DON'T SHOOT PEOPLE!

HE'S ACHING-- EXHAUSTED-- A WRECK--

--BUT AN EXCITEMENT TINGLES THROUGH HIM. HE FEELS ALMOST... *ELATED.*

ROBIN--NIGHTWING--BATMAN... HE'S *NONE* OF THESE THINGS, AND HE'S *ALL* OF THEM. BUT THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE, SOMETHING THAT STANDS ABOVE EVERYTHING HE KNOWS AND EVERYTHING HE'S DONE.

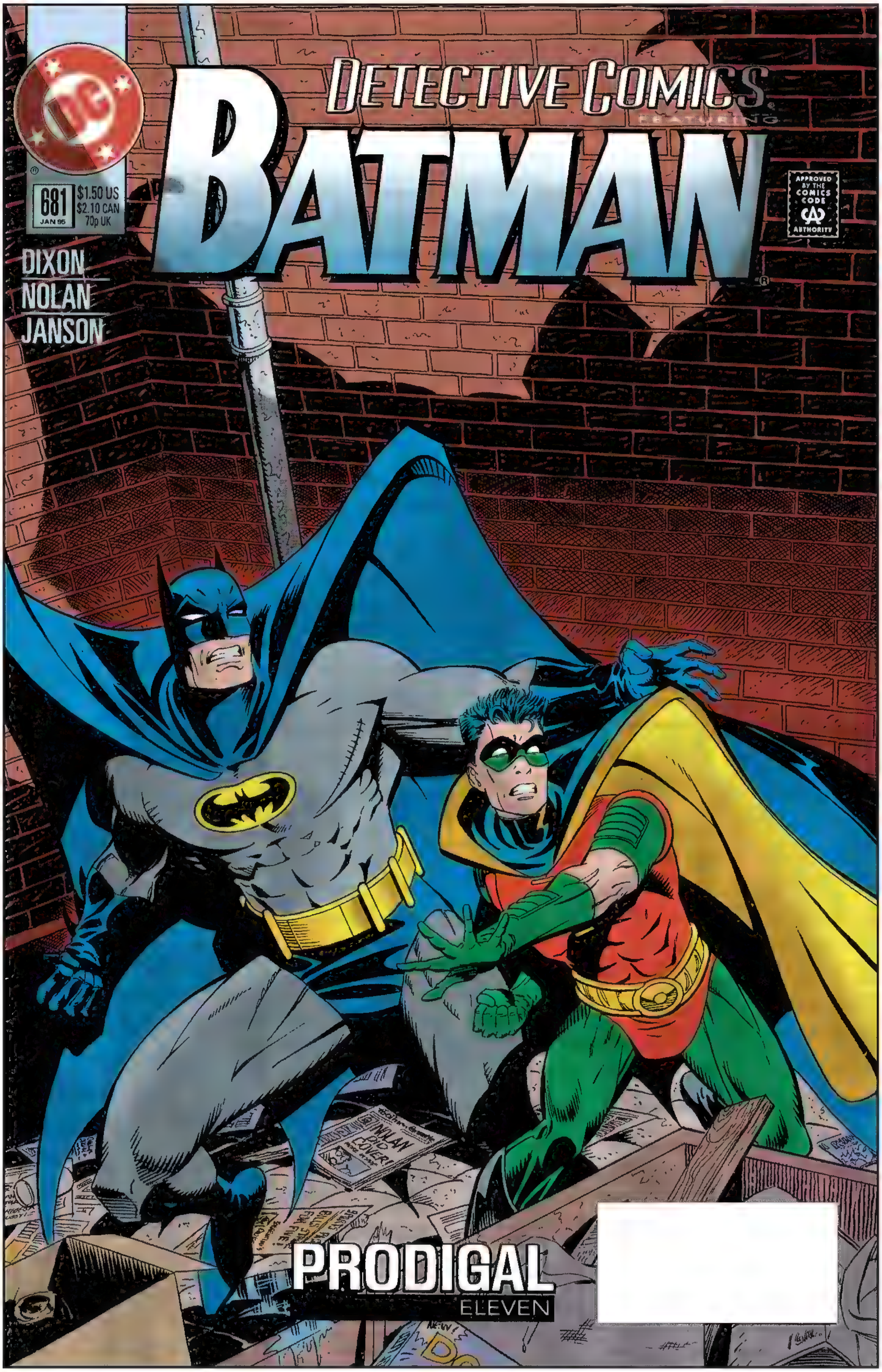
SOMETHING HE DOESN'T YET UNDERSTAND.

BUT MAYBE SOON HE WILL.

THE END.

CONTINUED IN DETECTIVE COMICS #681

Cover art by **GRAHAM NOLAN**



Knight Without Armor

"FIRST THE POWER WENT DOWN."

"THEN IT GOT DARK.

"THEN IT GOT BLOODY."

IT AIN'T GOIN' DOWN!

GUN IT!

Chuck DIXON *writer* • Graham NOLAN *penciller* • Klaus JANSON *guest inker* • Adrienne ROY *colorist* • John COSTANZA *letterer* • Darren VINCENZO *assoc. editor* • Scott PETERSON *editor*

BATMAN created by BOB KANE

"WHATEVER IT WAS, IT WAS BIG AND SCARY.

"AND BULLETPROOF.

UNNH!

"MIKEY AND FRANK WENT DOWN.

"THEN LITTLE DONNY AND ACE.

WHAT DO YOU WANT? WHO SENT YOU?

"I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU I WAS SCARED.

AGHHH!

EEEEEEYAAAAH!

"I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU I HID."

CAME RIGHT THROUGH THE GLASS FIFTY STORIES UP. HE WAS ARMORED AND HAD CLAWS AND WINGS AND--

-- YOU PROBABLY THINK I'M CRAZY.

NOT CRAZY, MORRY.

JUST FRIGHTENED.

HOW'D YOU FIND ME? HOW'D YOU MAKE ME FOR BEING AT THE CHUBBY MORAN HIT?

YOU WENT ON A BINGE, MORRY. YOU MUST HAVE TOLD EVERY BARTENDER DOWN ISLAND AVENUE.

HADDA TALK TO SOMEBODY.

AND YOU TALKED TO US.

THE POLICE ARE ON THEIR WAY. YOU *WAIT* FOR THEM, MORRY.

YUH-- YEAH.

ARMOR. CLAWS. WINGS.

YOU KNOW WHO WE'RE UP AGAINST, DON'T YOU?

AZRAEL.

HE'S OUT THERE SOMEWHERE.

I CAN *FEEL* IT.

4

I'M NOT SO SURE...

WE DON'T *KNOW* WHERE VALLEY TOOK OFF TO, TIM. WHY CAN'T WE ASSUME HE'S STILL IN GOTHAM?

I JUST DON'T SEE HIM PICKING UP THE VIGILANTE GIG AGAIN.

THE GUY'S *UNHINGED*. SO BRUCE CLEANED HIS CLOCK AND SENT HIM PACKING. THAT DOESN'T MEAN HE'S OFF THE *VENGEANCE* KICK.

*SOME*BODY OUT THERE'S TAKING OFF SECONDARY MOB FIGURES. FROM THE DESCRIPTIONS WE'VE GOT IT *SOUNDS* LIKE THE CHOIRBOY.

BUT BRUCE SAID THAT--

BRUCE ISN'T *INFALLIBLE*, TIM! HE *HAS* BEEN KNOWN TO BE WRONG.

HE *WAS* THE ONE WHO LEFT THAT LUNATIC IN CHARGE, REMEMBER?

WHOA!

JEEZ, *LISTEN* TO ME. MAYBE MY *COWL'S* ON TOO TIGHT.

ALL I KNOW IS I'M *NOT* GETTING THROWN OUT OF THE CAVE AGAIN.

OKAY.

BUT YOU HAVE TO ADMIT IT'S A LEAD WORTH FOLLOWING.

COULD BE. BUT I THINK WE MIGHT BE LOOKING AT A NEW PLAYER IN TOWN.

UH... THIS IS MAJOR CRIMES, RIGHT?

UH HUH.

I'M SUPPOSED TO SEE A LIEUTENANT ESSEN.

SURE.

SHE'S THE ONE DOING THE TALKING.

FOUR MOB HITS IN ONE WEEK.

TOP MOOKS AND THEIR PET GUNSELS SLASHED UP LIKE TOMATO SALAD AND YOU'RE TELLING ME WE DON'T HAVE LEAD *ONE*?

IT'S SOME *PSYCHO* CLIMBING UP THE SIDES OF BUILDINGS.

MORRY "*THE MALLET*" DEVANE IS OUR ONLY WITNESS AND HE DIDN'T SEE MUCH WORTH REPEATING.

CRIME SCENES ARE A WASHOUT, LIEUTENANT.

DRAW A PATTERN. EVERY VIC WAS MOBBED UP. WHO STANDS TO GAIN?

DIG DEEPER. LOOK HARDER. LET'S GET SOME *STEAM* ON THIS INVESTIGATION.

SHE'S PROBABLY GOING TO SEE IF THE COMMISH HAS HEARD ANYTHING FROM THE BAT-FREAK.

WHERE'VE YOU BEEN, HARV? THE GORDONS HAVE *NOT* BEEN THE HAPPY COUPLE LATELY.

UM... THAT'S LIEUTENANT ESSEN, RIGHT?

AND *YOU* ARE?

DETECTIVE MACKENZIE BOCK. I'M THE LIEUTENANT'S NEW ASSISTANT.

MY *DEEPEST* SYMPATHIES.

SO WE GOT EVERYTHING ON JEAN PAUL VALLEY THAT WE NEED.

EDUCATION. RESIDENCES. HIS LIKES AND DISLIKES. HIS FAVORITE DISNEY MOVIE.

AND ALL OF IT'S *USELESS.*

PAUL'S PAST IS IRRELEVANT. IT WAS ALL A *SHOW* UNTIL HE BECAME AZRAEL.

NONE OF THIS TELLS US WHERE HE IS *NOW.*

HE *MIGHT* BE AT GRAND AND BELMONT PLAZA.

HUH?

POLICE ARE RESPONDING TO A CALL ABOUT MEN OUT ON A LEDGE OF HYDE TOWERS. SHOTS FIRED.

WE WON'T GET THERE UNTIL IT'S OVER.

UNLESS WE TAKE THE SUBWAY ROCKET.

I DON'T KNOW...

OKAY. BUT **I** DRIVE.

NO PROBLEM.

IF WE'RE LATE FOR WORK IT'S *YOUR* FAULT, Y'KNOW.

AW, *QUIT* IT, WILLYA?

I SEE A TRAIN COMIN!

LOCAL OR EXPRESS?

OH *YEAH!*

HAROLD JUKED THE CONTROLS SINCE LAST TIME. YOU'RE TIED INTO GOTHAM TRANSIT'S COMPUTERS.

IT'S AN EXPRESS.

WE'RE INSTANTLY ROUTED TO OFF-TRAFFIC TRACKS IF THERE'S A TRAIN WITHIN TWO MILES ON OUR LINE.

NICE.

WHAT'S THE *STORY*, VINCE?

HELLUVA SHOOTOUT ON THE TWENTIETH FLOOR LEDGE. STARTED IN A RESTAURANT. STILL GOIN' AT IT.

I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF CLIMBING UP THERE, HARV.

BUT IF WE WAIT LONG ENOUGH THEY'LL COME DOWN TO *US*.

I JUST *SIGNED* FOR THIS CAR. DIDN'T EVEN GET TO FILL THE ASHTRAYS YET.

*SOME*BODY'S MAKING THE CLIMB, SERGEANT BULLOCK.

MORE FREAKS! THEY'RE COMIN' OUTTA THE WOODWORK!

ROBIN! HEADS UP!

IT'S "LUCKY" SILVER!

SO, THE BATMAN'S IN ON THE HIT! ALL YOU FREAKS ARE IN IT TOGETHER! FIRST THE WINGED PSYCHO AND NOW YOU!

UNNH!

UH!

I'M YOUR ONLY HOPE, LUCKY.

WHO'S TRYING TO HIT YOU?

I DUNNO-- SOME NUTBAR IN A MASK AND CLAWS AND--

HIM!

HE'S THE ONE TRYIN' TO TAKE ME OUT!

LUCKY!

HE'S GONNA KILL ME!

NO

WAS "LUCKY" A NICK-NAME?

IT *HAD* TO BE VALLEY. IT *HAD* TO BE!

I DON'T KNOW...

IT *COULD* HAVE BEEN.

MAYBE I WAS *WRONG*. MAYBE THE ANSWER *IS* IN THE PAST.

MAYBE IT'S TIME WE EACH PURSUED OUR *OWN* TACKS.

WHAT'S *THAT* SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

IT MEANS I WASN'T HIRED JUST TO BE A *SIDE-KICK*. I FOLLOW MY HUNCHES AND YOU FOLLOW YOURS.

I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN. STRENGTH IN NUMBERS.

OR DIVIDE AND CONQUER.

SO LET'S LOOK AT THE LIST OF VICTIMS, HAROLD.

NICK "THE GRIP" TELLER. BIG DANNY FRESCO. LITTLE DANNY FRESCO. CHUBBY MORAN.

AND LUCKY SILVER MAKES FIVE.

SO WHAT'S THE CONNECTION, HAROLD?

WELL, I'LL TELL YOU THE CONNECTION.

PROTECTION.

WITH TOUGH TONY BRESSI AND JIMMY VALENTINE OUT OF THE WAY, THE GOTHAM POLICY RACKETS FELL TO THESE FIVE AND...

HANDY ANDY.

SO HE'S GOT TO BE THE NEXT VICTIM OR SUSPECT NUMBER ONE.

EITHER WAY HE'S WORTH A QUICK CHECK.

OKAY. I'M RECORDING THIS FOR YOU, ROBIN.

JUST SO I COULD SAY I *TOLD* YOU SO.

I'M ON TOP OF THE BUILDING WHERE VALLEY'S FATHER WAS KILLED. THE TERRACE WHERE WE FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH THE CHOIRBOY.

HE'S BEEN *BACK* HERE. I *KNOW* HE HAS. HE LOOKED OUT OVER THIS CITY JUST LIKE I'M DOING NOW.

AND WHAT DID HE *SEE*, ROBIN?

SALVATION?

EASY ACCESS.

EITHER HANDY ANDY'S LAX ON SECURITY OR HE KNOWS HE HAS NOTHING TO *WORRY* ABOUT.

CLAP CLAP

WHO'S *THIS*? THIS OUR BIGTIME *HITTER*?

MAN, I *LOVE* THIS GADGET. ALL I GOTTA DO IS CLAP MY HANDS AND THE LIGHTS GO ON.

THE *TV* TOO.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE *BRAT*, ANDY?

SHOOT HIM AND THROW HIM IN THE TRASH COMPACTOR.

I BEEN *DYING* TO USE THAT GIZMO.

A RESCUE MISSION

NO WAY THE CHOIRBOY MISSED THIS SYMBOLISM.

HOLY JEEZE!

MAYBE YOU CAN HELP ME.

MUH-ME?

HAVE YOU SEEN ANYONE *NEW* AROUND HERE? ANYONE STRANGE. SCARY.

SCUH-SCARIER THAN *YOU*?

COULD BE.

THERE'S A *NEW* GUY 'ROUND THE MISSION. REAL *SMART*. MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP YA.

GOT MONEY OUTTA THEM *BANK* MACHINES. TREATED EVERY-BODY TO A *PARTY*. GOOD WITH THEM *COMPUTERS* AND LIKE THAT.

I'D *REALLY* LIKE TO MEET HIM.

KRAK

BLAM

UNNH!

DID YOU ORDER THIS BY PHONE OR CAN I PICK ONE UP IN A *STORE*?

CLAP CLAP

GET UP, FELLA. SOMEBUDDY HERE TO SEE YA.

GOD LOVES ALL

HM?

TO SEE ME?

I DON'T KNOW ANYONE. I DON'T...

YOU KNOW ME...

...AZRAEL.

NO.

YOU PROMISED... YOU PROMISED... I'D BE FREE...

...FREE

THIS THE GUY YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR?

HEY, I'M ASKIN' YA... THIS THE GUY?

YOU WEREN'T EXPECTING ME BUT YOU WERE EXPECTING *SOME*BODY.

WHO'S *COMING* FOR YOU, BARON?

HEY, I DON'T *KNOW*. SOMEBODY *NEW* IN TOWN. I JUST FIGURE I'M NEXT ON THE *LIST*.

DON'T TAKE A GENIUS TO--

KUH-KRIIIISH

UH!

NO... NOT ME... NOT *THIS*!

FIRST *YOU*, ANDREW BARON... THEN THE *BOY*...

OKAY. YOUR INSTINCTS BEAT *MINE*, TIM.

PAUL'S IN GOTHAM, ALL RIGHT. BUT I'M NOT SO SURE *HE* KNOWS THAT.

THE GUY'S A VEG. A TOTAL BURNOUT.

HE'S NOT OUR KILLER. HE DOESN'T HAVE IT *IN* HIM ANYMORE, TIM. SO IF YOU WANT TO SAY "*I TOLD YOU SO*," GO RIGHT AHEAD.

I THOUGHT I TAUGHT YOU THAT YOU HAVE TO ELIMINATE *ALL* POSSIBILITIES IN A HOMICIDE INVESTI-GATION.

THE ONLY WRONG GUESSES ARE THE ONES YOU OVER-LOOK.

WHAT ARE *YOU* DOING HERE?

NO WITNESSES... NO ONE SEES STEELJACKET AND LIVES...

I'M HOME.

YOU DID EXPECT ME BACK. RIGHT, DICK?

I'M NOT SO SURE I DID, BRUCE.

CONTINUED IN ROBIN #13

Cover art by TOM GRUMMETT AND RAY KRYSSING

WINGS OVER GOTHAM

I WAS JUST FOLLOWING A LEAD ON A SERIES OF MOB MURDERS.

I WASN'T LOOKING FOR A FIGHT.

NO WITNESSES!

NO ONE SEES STEELJACKET AND LIVES!

BUT THE FIGHT FOUND ME.

CHUCK DIXON
STORY
JOHN CLEARY
& PHIL JIMENEZ
PENCILS
RAY KRYSSING
INKS
PHIL JIMENEZ
INKS pp. 19, 21
ADRIENNE ROY
COLORS
ALBERT DE GUZMAN
LETTERS
JORDAN B. GORFINKEL
ASSISTANT EDITOR
DENNY O'NEIL
EDITOR

I FIGURED THIS SCENE FOR THE NEXT POSSIBLE HIT.

LOOKS LIKE BULLOCK AND MONTOYA DID THE SAME.

FREEZE, WINGNUT!

YOU WERE RIGHT, HARV! THIS GUY WEARS WINGS!

"WEARS" WINGS?

I DO MORE THAN WEAR THEM!

DICK'S WRONG ABOUT THE MURDERER. HE'S SURE IT'S JEAN PAUL BACK TO HIS AZRAEL MANIA.

TURNS OUT I'M RIGHT THAT IT'S A NEW PLAYER IN GOTHAM.

BUT I'M NOT GLOATING.

3

I'M WISHING NOW I WAS WRONG.

SO WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, BRUCE?

THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT NOW, DICK. LET'S JUST SAY I NEEDED TO RETHINK A FEW THINGS. DECIDE WHO I REALLY AM.

IF YOU SAY ANYTHING ABOUT "FINDING MYSELF" I THINK I'LL PUKE.

I THOUGHT YOU'D BE GLAD TO SEE ME BACK.

THAT DEPENDS ON WHY YOU CAME BACK.

TO TAKE UP THE MANTLE AGAIN. TO TAKE BACK MY PLACE.

FOR HOW LONG THIS TIME?

NOT NOW, DICK.

WE CAN TALK ABOUT THIS WHEN--

RIGHT NOW.

WE'RE SETTLING THIS RIGHT NOW, BRUCE.

4

THE IDEA IS TO GET THE JUMPLINE WRAPPED AROUND SOMETHING STATIONARY.

MONTOYA! THE KID!

BUT IT FEELS LIKE I LATCHED ONTO A JUMBO JET.

THEN I'M LOOKING AT A TWENTY-STORY DROP.

5

WHAT IS IT YOU WANT TO SAY?

I'M NOT SURE WHERE TO START. THERE'RE SO MANY THINGS I'VE WANTED TO SAY.

SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES LOST.

WE DISSOLVED THE PARTNERSHIP... BUT WE NEVER REALLY DISCUSSED IT.

THERE ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE SOMETHING GOING ON. SOME INTERRUPTION.

THERE WAS NOTHING TO SAY. YOU'D OUTGROWN IT. YOU NEEDED TO STRIKE OUT ON YOUR OWN.

I UNDERSTOOD. AFTER ALL THE YEARS AND ALL THE DANGER WE DIDN'T NEED WORDS.

SOMETIMES YOU'RE HOPELESS, YOU KNOW THAT?

YOU NEVER NEED WORDS. YOU NEVER QUESTION. YOU NEVER EXAMINE YOURSELF OR THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU.

TOO MANY QUESTIONS YOU'VE NEVER ASKED YOURSELF.

I THINK THAT'S THE ONLY THING YOU'RE AFRAID OF.

6

THIS DIDN'T WORK OUT LIKE I PLANNED.

I MEANT TO SNARE HIM WITH A 'RANG AND BRACE MYSELF INSIDE THE BUILDING.

I GOT IT HALF RIGHT.

YOU WANTED A RIDE, BOY?

I'LL SHOW YOU A RIDE...

HANDS GOING NUMB FROM MY GRIP ON THE JUMPLINE.

MY HUNDRED AND THIRTY POUNDS ISN'T EVEN SLOWING HIM DOWN.

HEADING FOR THE ROOF OF THE HERRIOT TOWER.

7

COULD BE SCARY.

THAT KID'S GOT *STONES*.

THAT KID'S GOT *BRAIN* DAMAGE. THAT FLYING FLAKE IS GOING TO MAKE A *STREET* PIZZA OUT OF HIM.

BOCK! KEEP AN *EYE* ON THEM. WATCH WHICH WAY THEY GO!

THEN WHAT, SARGE?

THEN TELL *ME* OVER THE HORN. WE'LL *FOLLOW* THEM! COME *ON*!

HOW ABOUT WHISTLING UP A CHOPPER, HARV?

WITH *THIS* CITY'S BUDGET? MAYBE YOU SHOULD PRAY FOR A FLYING *CARPET*, MONTOYA!

THEN IT'S UP TO *US*?

LIKE *ALWAYS*. BOCK! CAN YOU *SEE* THEM?

MOVING EAST ACROSS GRAND AT THIRTY-FIRST. PICKING UP SPEED.

KEEP A *GRIP*, KID.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

SAW THIS ON THE NEWS TONIGHT.

A FUNDRAISER FOR MAYOR KROL'S REELECTION CAMPAIGN.

WHOA-HO-HO!

IF I WASN'T IN DANGER OF GETTING SQUASHED LIKE A BUG ON A WINDSHIELD THIS WOULD BE EMBARRASSING.

HOPE I LIVE TO BE HUMILIATED BY THE MEMORY.

IT ONLY GETS ROUGHER FROM HERE.

THAT'S *RIGHT*, ISN'T IT?

YOU QUESTION YOURSELF. YOU DOUBT YOURSELF FOR A SECOND AND IT ALL COMES *APART*, RIGHT? THAT'S WHY YOU CAN'T FACE ME *NOW*.

YOU DON'T *KNOW* HOW I QUESTION MYSELF AND EVERYTHING I'VE BECOME.

THE *RIGHT* OF IT. THE *WRONG* OF IT.

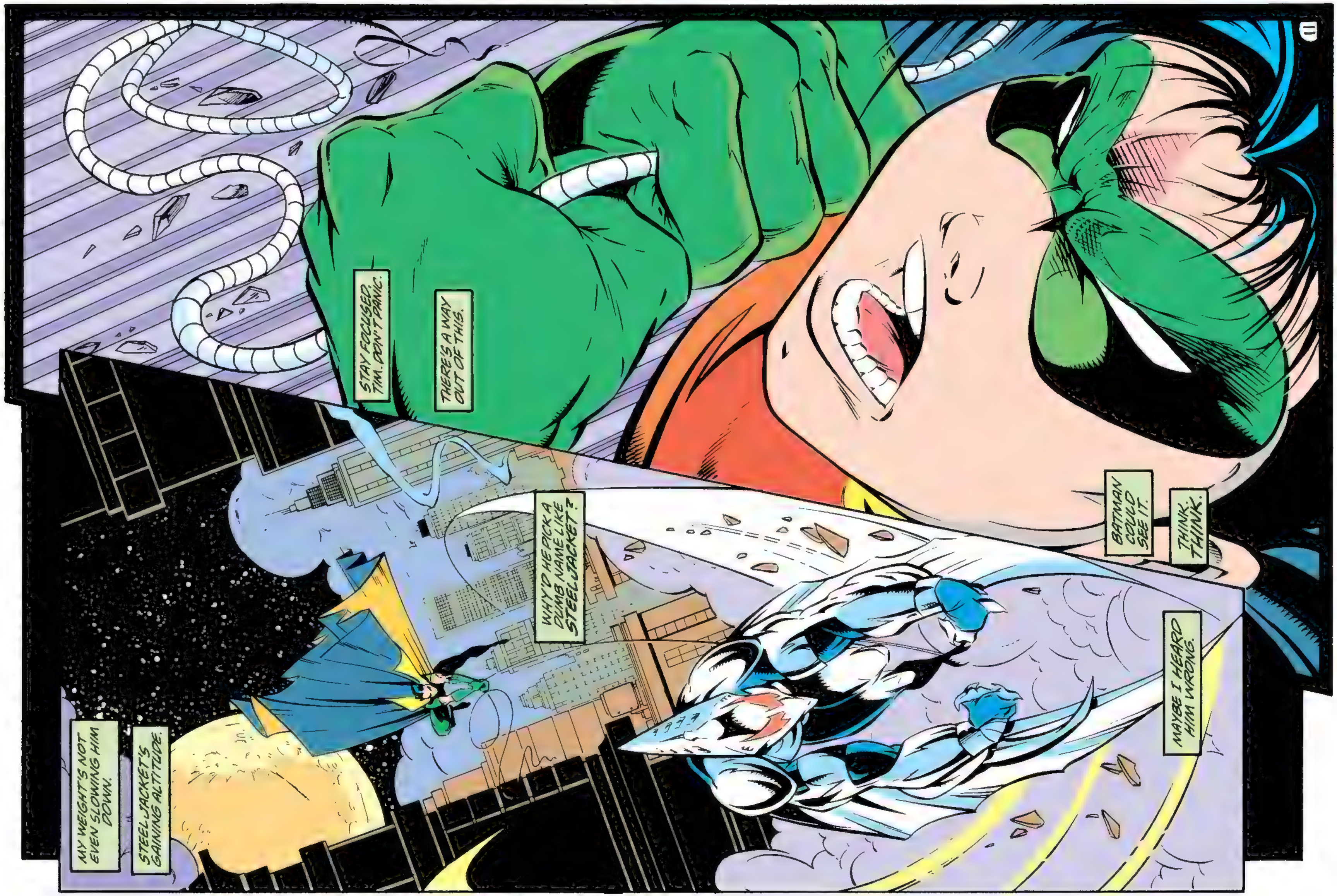
NOT ALLOWING MYSELF ANY REWARD FOR THE GOOD. *DAMNING* MYSELF FOR EVERY MISTAKE.

THINKING OF EVERYONE WHO'S SACRIFICED THEMSELVES IN *MY* WAR.

EVERYONE CLOSE TO ME. EVERYONE WHO *CARED*.

YOU CAN'T BEGIN TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING.

IN MEMORY OF
JASON TODD
~ROBIN~
A GOOD SOLDIER


STAY FOCUSED TIM. DON'T PANIC.
THERE'S A WAY OUT OF THIS.
MY WEIGHT'S NOT EVEN SLOWING HIM DOWN.
STEELJACKET'S GAINING ALTITUDE.
WHY'D HE PICK A DUMB NAME LIKE STEELJACKET?
BATMAN COULD SEE IT.
THINK. THINK.
MAYBE I HEARD HIM WRONG.

WHAT WOULD BRUCE DO?

BUT YOU LEFT GOTHAM IN THE CARE OF JEAN PAUL. YOU HARDLY KNEW HIM.

AND WHAT YOU DID KNOW DIDN'T EXACTLY RECOMMEND HIM FOR THE JOB.

J

LIBERTY

YOU LEFT TIM ALONE WITH A LUNATIC. THE KID COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED.

THERE WASN'T TIME.

NO TIME TO PICK UP A PHONE? NO TIME TO CALL ME?

IT WASN'T THAT EASY. YOU KNOW IT WASN'T.

I DIDN'T KNOW YOUR SITUATION. I KNEW YOU WERE WORKING THROUGH SOME PROBLEMS...

YEAH. "PROBLEMS".

AND I THOUGHT THERE WAS ONE GUY WHO'D HAVE FAITH IN ME.

BUT WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO THE TEST, YOU PICKED SOMEBODY ELSE TO SUCCEED YOU.

A STRANGER.

CAN'T HOLD ON MUCH LONGER.

CUTTING CIRCULATION FROM MY HANDS.

GAMES ARE OVER.

THIS GUY'S GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT LOSING ME.

DROP LIKE A STONE. BUY SOME SLACK ON THIS LINE.

LOOSEN THE HOLD. GET A REAL GRIP.

PAIN'S INCREDIBLE AS THE BLOOD FLOWS BACK INTO MY WRISTS AND HANDS.

13

BITE THE BULLET AND HANG ON.

SARGE, I'M LOSING SIGHT OF THEM WAY PAST GOTHAM TOWER.

WE GOT VISUAL, BOCK. GET *OFF* THE LINE.

BOCK OUT.

MONTOYA, HOOK A LEFT AT ROBBINS CIRCLE.

HARD LEFT?

HARD, MONTOYA! DOWN WHITNEY AND CROSS GRAND.

HANG ON, KID.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL WE CAN DO, BUT WE'RE GONNA DO EVERYTHING WE *CAN*.

SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH THIS PLAN.

JUST CAN'T SORT IT ALL OUT IN THIS RUSH.

UNNH!

MAYBE NOT.

I STOPPED HIM.

HERE'S WHERE I GET--

--OFF?

NOTHING'S GOING THE WAY I PLANNED.

I NEVER *KNEW* YOU WANTED TO FOLLOW ME AS THE BATMAN.

WELL... I'VE *THOUGHT* ABOUT IT.

YOU LEFT BEFORE WE COULD EVER DISCUSS IT.

I ASSUMED YOU WANTED TO GET OUT FROM UNDER MY SHADOW. MAKE A NAME FOR YOURSELF.

YOU'VE DONE THAT. CREATED A LIFE. FOUGHT YOUR OWN FIGHTS.

I DIDN'T HAVE THE *RIGHT* TO CALL YOU BACK.

...THE RIGHT?

I'D *DIE* FOR YOU, BRUCE.

BUT I COULDN'T ASK YOU TO.

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO...

16

AN EXTRA TON AND A HALF OF GRANITE HAS TAKEN THE WIND OUT OF HIS WINGS.

I COULD JUMP CLEAR.

TO A TEN-FLOOR FALL.

SMASHED ON THE SIDEWALK OR CUT TO RIBBONS.

NO TIME TO WORK THE RISK FACTORS.

JUST HANG ON.

17

AND PRAY FOR A MIRACLE.

I CAN'T SEE *EITHER* OF THEM, HARV.

LET'S GET UP THERE BEFORE THE BUZZARD GETS *AIRBORNE* AGAIN.

AND WATCH THE *WINGSPREAD* THIS TIME!

FORGET THE ELEVATORS. THEY CAN'T BE MORE THAN SIX FLIGHTS UP!

YOU MUST'VE GOTTEN THE DOUGH-NUTS WITH EXTRA SUGAR THIS TIME, HARV.

WIND'S RUSHING THIS WAY.

FOLLOW ME AND REMEMBER THE KID'S ONE OF *US*.

KID!

STAY DOWN!

18

LOOK, THIS IS THE PART I'M NOT GOOD AT.

YOU REACHED AN AGE WHERE YOU COULDN'T BE THE BOY WONDER ANY-MORE. YOU OUTGREW IT.

A DISTANCE GREW BETWEEN US. I LEFT SO MANY THINGS UNSAID.

I HANDLED IT ALL WRONG.

BUT THAT'S THE WAY IT ALWAYS IS. ISN'T IT?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. THE WAY WHAT ALWAYS IS?

BETWEEN FATHERS AND SONS.

19

I CAN FEEL THE HEAT OF THE LEAD FLYING OVER MY HEAD.

I CAN HEAR STEELJACKET'S BREATH EXPLODE FROM HIS LUNGS WITH EACH HIT.

THEN EVERYTHING'S QUIET EXCEPT FOR THE RINGING IN MY EARS.

RADIO CENTRAL AND HAVE HIM PICKED UP AT SEAGATE. THAT'S THE END OF THE LINE.

END OF THE LINE FOR *FLYBOY* TOO. NOTHING HUMAN COULD HAVE SURVIVED ALL *THAT.*

YEAH...

...NOTHING *HUMAN.*

20

I'M HURTING NOW. I KNOW IT'LL BE WORSE IN THE MORNING.

AND TOMORROW'S A GYM DAY.

SO. DID YOU CATCH YOUR BOGEYMAN?

YEAH. BIG GUY WITH STEEL WINGS AND CLAWS. WE TORE THE PIONEER OFF THE TOP OF CITY HALL.

CAN WE TALK ABOUT THIS IN THE MORNING? I WANT TO GO HOME AND--

HEY. WHAT'S WITH THE *NIGHTWING* COSTUME?

GOING BACK TO MY ORIGINAL GIG, BOY WONDER.

DOES THAT MEAN YOU'RE *GIVING UP* ON BEING BATMAN OR--

--OR HANDING THE CAPE AND COWL BACK TO THE ORIGINAL?

BRUCE! YOU'RE--

--BACK?

21

YOUR COSTUME... IT'S...
IT'S JUST THE START OF THE CHANGES I'M GOING TO MAKE.

HOW THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN

AN EPIC BATTLE with Bane left Gotham's defender, Batman, unable to maintain his vigilante mantle. Deputized as an interim Batman, Jean Paul Valley (a.k.a. Azrael) has unfortunately taken his appointed role too far. Increasingly disturbed, Valley has eschewed justice in favor of remorseless vengeance, violently eliminating villains, much to Bruce Wayne's dismay.

Bruce knows he must reclaim his title, but the fight won't be easy. His broken back is miraculously repaired thanks to Dr. Shondra Kinsolving and his fighting skills are revitalized with the help of martial arts grandmaster Lady Shiva. Bruce is ready for an ultimate showdown. In a war zone of creeps and criminals, he and his faithful Robin battle on, taking down Two-Face and the Croc, but always keeping their eye on Azrael. Finally, it is in the Batcave where they meet to see who shall be victorious...

Will the rightful Batman be restored? Find out in this epic conclusion,
BATMAN: KNIGHTFALL VOLUME 3, collecting BATMAN 509-510, 512-514;
BATMAN: SHADOW OF THE BAT 29-30, 32-34; DETECTIVE COMICS 676-677,
679-681; BATMAN: LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT 62-63; ROBIN 8-9, 11-13;
and CATWOMAN 12-13.

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The Hand